NEW

YOUR HANDBOOK TO THE LAND OF MORNING CALM

KOREA

10 MUST-SEE SIGHTS IN SOUTH KOREA

FROM PALACES TO SKYSCRAPERS

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO SEOUL

HALLYU! FEVER: THE RISE OF K-POP

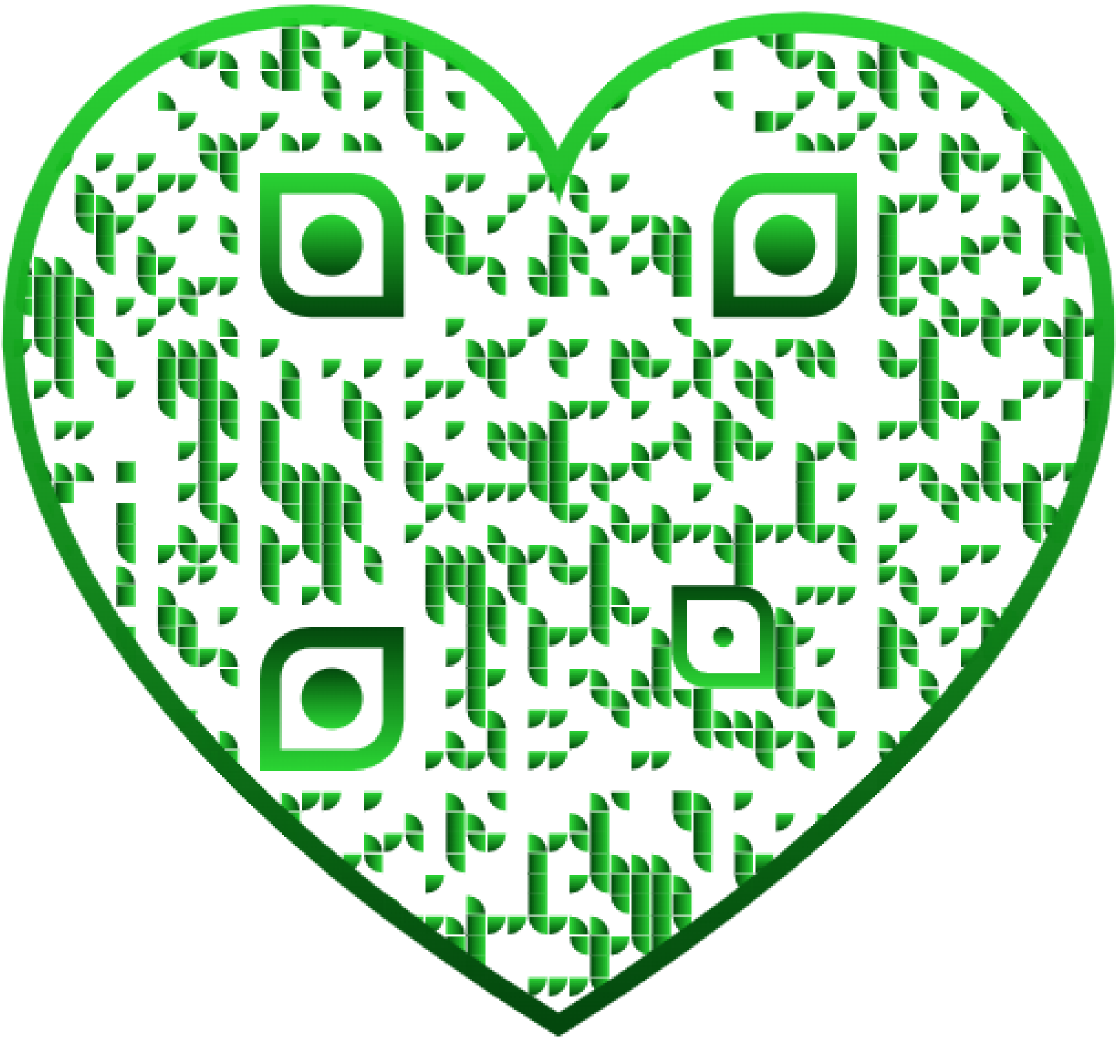
KOREAN CULTURE: THE WORLD OF ART AND DANCE

Digital Edition

FUTURE

FIRST EDITION

HISTORY • K-DRAMAS • CUISINE • LANGUAGE • K-BEAUTY



WELCOME

Hello or 안녕하세요! If you have picked up this guide, then it is likely that you are planning a visit to South Korea or you are curious to learn more about the Korean Peninsula. And why wouldn't you be? The Korean Peninsula, which has been divided into North Korea (also known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea) and South Korea since 1945, has a fascinating and complex history. It has witnessed the rise and fall of dynasties, devastating wars and colonisation, and a division that remains tense today.

However, Korea is also home to a unique and rich culture that blends tradition and modernity, persevering for centuries despite all of the turmoil. In the Book of Korea, you'll discover the spirit of a country like no other – from its history, delicious cuisine and traditional dress to its distinctive customs and etiquette, the vibrant world of Hallyu and the landscapes and landmarks that you absolutely must visit.

CONTENTS

HISTORY OF KOREA

10 The Three Kingdoms of Korea
14 History of Joseon Korea
16 Sejong the Great
18 Joseon Koreans
20 Gyeongbokgung Palace
22 The Colonisation of Korea
26 The Korean War and North Korea
36 The Making of Modern-day Korea

CULTURE & CUSTOMS

44 A Crash Course in the Korean Language
48 A Taste of South Korea
52 Recipe: Kimchi
53 Recipe: Bugae-Jjigae
54 Recipe: Bibimbap
56 Hanbok: Traditional Korean Clothing
60 Exploring Korean Art
66 A Guide to South Korean Etiquette

HALLYU

72 What is Hallyu?
74 The Rise of K-pop
82 The K-pop Phenomenon
92 South Korea on Screen
100 Get the K-Beauty Glow

TRAVEL

108 Your Ultimate Guide to Seoul
116 Natural Wonders of South Korea
120 Naejangsan
122 Korean Holidays and Festivals
126 10 Must-See Sights in South Korea

22

26

126

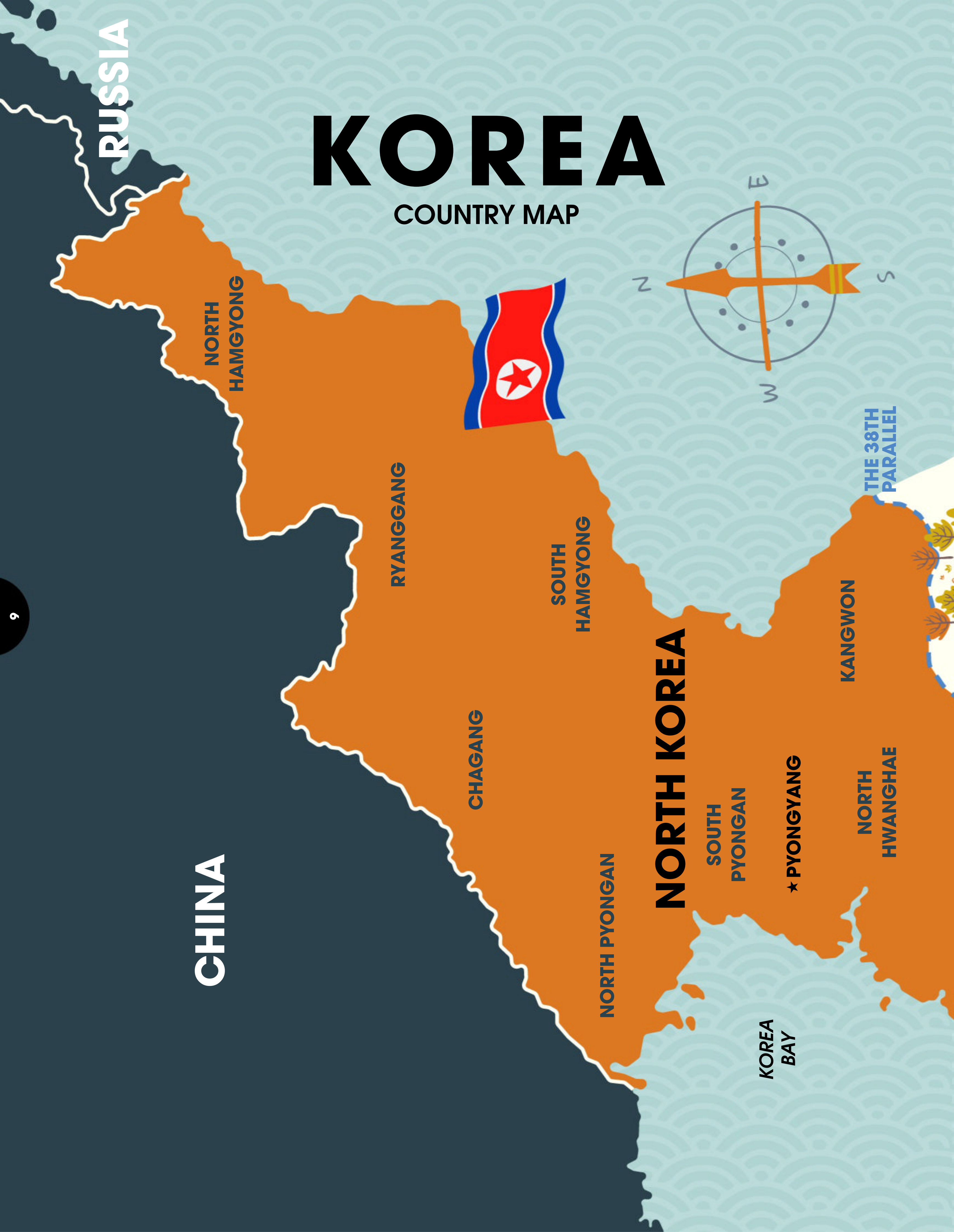
48

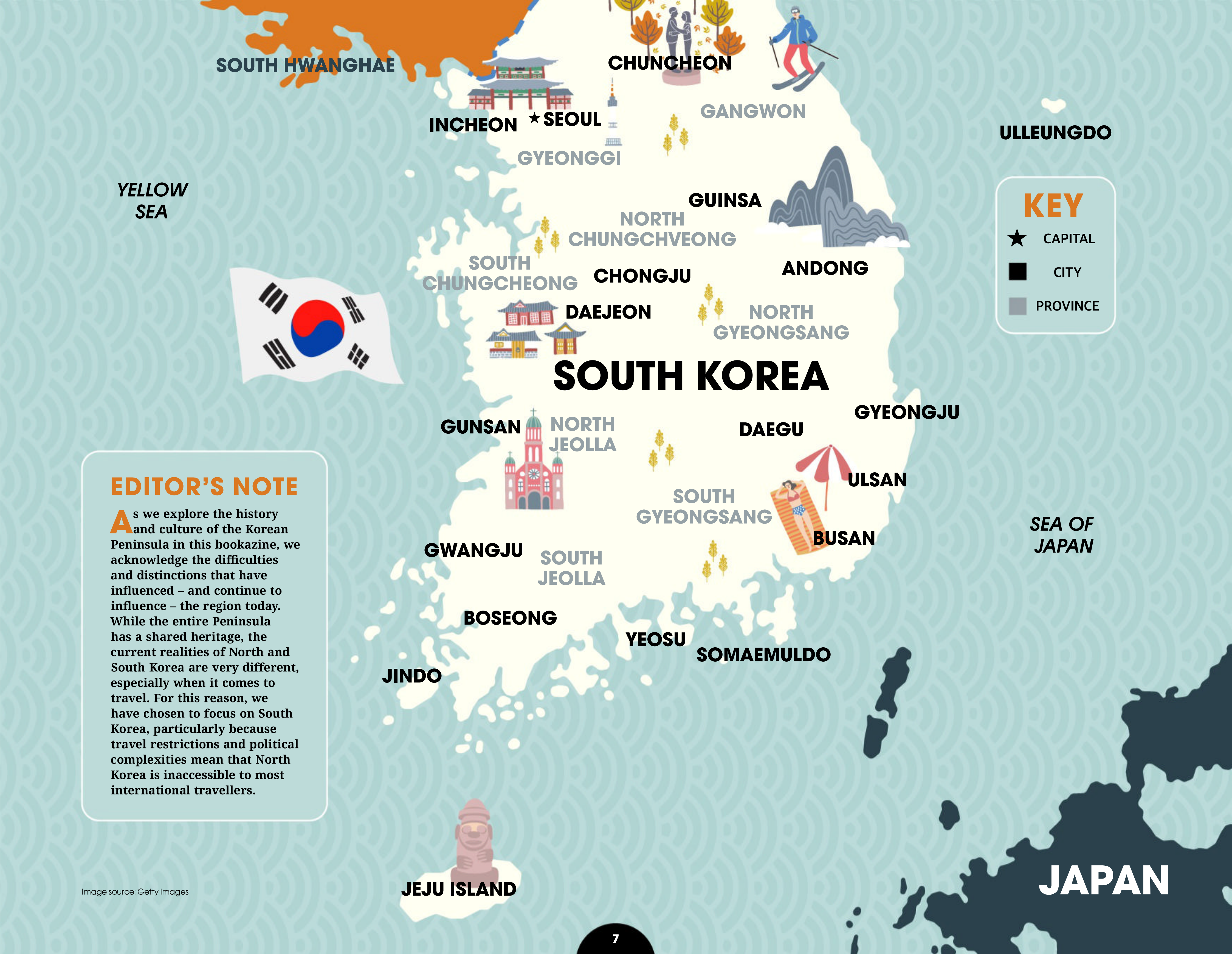
44

72

KOREA

COUNTRY MAP


RUSSIA
CHINA
NORTH HAMGYONG
RYANGGANG
SOUTH HAMGYONG
CHAGANG
NORTH PYONGAN
NORTH KOREA
SOUTH PYONGAN
★ PYONGYANG
KANGWON
NORTH HWANGHAE
THE 38TH PARALLEL
KOREA BAY
N
E
S
W

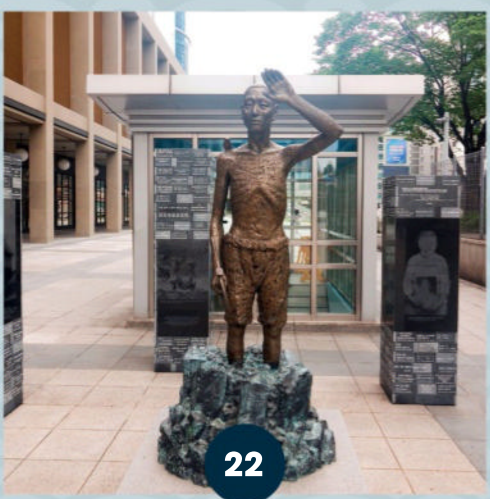

SOUTH HWANGHAE
CHUNCHEON
INCHEON
★ SEOUL
GANGWON
GYEONGGI
ULLEUNGDO
YELLOW SEA
GUINSA
NORTH CHUNGCHVEONG
SOUTH CHUNGCHEONG
CHONGJU
ANDONG
DAEJEON
NORTH GYEONGSANG
KEY
★ CAPITAL
■ CITY
▨ PROVINCE
SOUTH KOREA
GYEONGJU
GUNSAN
NORTH JEOLLA
DAEGU
ULSAN
SOUTH GYEONGSANG
BUSAN
SEA OF JAPAN
GWANGJU
SOUTH JEOLLA
BOSEONG
YEOSU
SOMAEMULDO
JINDO
JEJU ISLAND
JAPAN

EDITOR'S NOTE

As we explore the history and culture of the Korean Peninsula in this bookazine, we acknowledge the difficulties and distinctions that have influenced – and continue to influence – the region today. While the entire Peninsula has a shared heritage, the current realities of North and South Korea are very different, especially when it comes to travel. For this reason, we have chosen to focus on South Korea, particularly because travel restrictions and political complexities mean that North Korea is inaccessible to most international travellers.

Image source: Getty Images

10



22

20

16

26

HISTORY OF KOREA

10 The Three Kingdoms of Korea
14 History of Joseon Korea
16 Sejong the Great
18 Joseon Koreans
20 Gyeongbokgung Palace
22 The Colonisation of Korea
26 The Korean War and North Korea
36 The Making of Modern-day Korea

WORDS: Hareth Al Bustani

THE THREE KINGDOMS OF KOREA

As China crumbled into a series of petty kingdoms, three powers emerged across the Korean Peninsula, ready to overthrow the imperial yoke and seize power for themselves

Trading with the Chinese Wu dynasty gave the Baekje access to Chinese literature, artisans and monks, fuelling rapid cultural development

In 108 BCE, the Chinese Han dynasty wiped out the Gojoseon kingdom, the first Korean state, based in the north of the peninsula. However, strong local resistance soon forced the Chinese to withdraw from three of their four commanderies. The fourth, in the far northwest, with its capital at Pyongyang, was a powerful outpost, facilitating the spread of Chinese culture into the peninsula. In 313 CE, it was captured by an upstart kingdom, called the Goguryeo – one of three Korean powers to thrive in the vacuum left behind by the Gojoseon, alongside the Baekje in the southwest, and the Silla in the southeast. Having overturned the old order, in the ensuing centuries the three would wage war on each other until one emerged supreme.

According to the 11th-century history of Korea, the Goguryeo was founded by a prince of the former Manchurian kingdom of Buyeo in 37 BCE. Bringing together five tribes in the middle reaches of the Yalu River in southern Manchuria, the Goguryeo fast grew into the Korean Peninsula's pre-eminent cultural and political power. One by one, it conquered its neighbours; from the polities of Ye and Okjeo to the Han Chinese prefecture of Xientu, all the way south to the central peninsula.

Meanwhile, in 18 BCE, another supposed Buyeo prince led a group of settlers to the southwest of the Korean Peninsula, creating the Baekje dynasty, centred around the fertile Han River near modern-day Seoul. Just one of 50 such polities in the confederacy of Mahan, the Baekje conquered and annexed their neighbours, before attacking and destroying the Chinese commandery of Daifang.

To the east, the Silla emerged from a small walled town in the modern coastal North Gyeongsang Province in 57 BCE. Uniting 12 chiefdoms from across the southeast, the Silla then went on to absorb their weaker neighbours. When the Gojoseon kingdom fell, an exodus of refugees flooded into Silla, bringing its iron culture and boosting the state's growth.

Of the three, the Goguryeo were the most aggressive. When the Sui dynasty came to power in China, the Goguryeo offered their allegiance to the Central Asian Turks, a perennial thorn in the Sui's side. The Sui amassed an army of 300,000 men, launching four successive campaigns, only to be utterly

Did you know?

The kingdoms of Korea were in constant rivalry with each other, with many alliances being forged and broken defeated every time – ushering in their own demise.

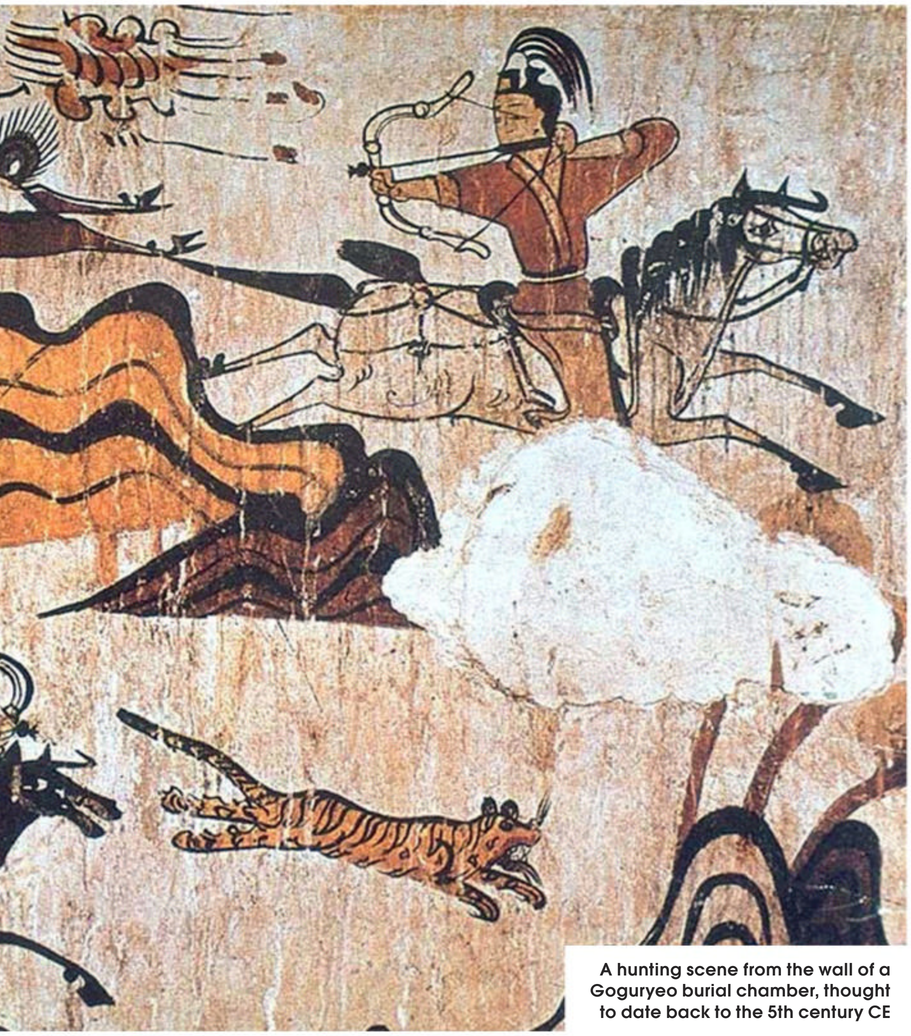
From its capital in Pyongyang, the Goguryeo kingdom acted as a conduit for Chinese culture, learning from the region's established military and cultural powerhouse. Eager to elevate their education and cultural institutions, the Goguryeo established the first National Confucian Academy in 372 CE. Though a shamanistic society, when the Buddhist monk Sundo arrived that same year, the king was suitably impressed, making it the official state religion. Through these twin schools, the rulership sought to spread shared customs across its growing territory, and unify its various sources of power. While the Baekje adopted Buddhism just over a decade later, the Silla would not do so until the 6th century. In each society, Buddhism would have a profoundly modernising effect, encouraging and facilitating the advancement of education, art and culture.

The Baekje enjoyed trade with the Chinese Wu dynasty, specifically requesting copies of the Chinese classics, while simultaneously initiating a cultural exchange with their allies, the Japanese kingdom of Yamato. They shipped over artists, musicians, physicians, scholars, monks, artisans and architects, playing a crucial role in the spread of continental culture. While this East Asian trade route transformed the Baekje into one of the pre-eminent Korean kingdoms, with tentacles as far as Shandong across the Yellow Sea in China, the nature of the state – with a foreign ruling class dominating the local masses – proved tenuous. After the Goguryeo finished subduing the northern nomadic tribes, they attacked the Baekje, forcing them to move their capital city southwards twice, landing at Sabi, or modern Buyeo, where the kingdom began to truly thrive.

Meanwhile, the conservative Silla had a much slower start than its neighbours – at times, even weaker than the confederacy of Gaya, nestled between them and the Baekje. However, in the absence of haste, they built their kingdom on a solid foundation. Silla was centred around an indigenous semi-democratic institution, the council of hwabaek – a court of aristocrats descended from six communal chiefs, headed by a sacred leader. The hwabaek allowed the Silla to table national issues for debate and reach a

Buddhist iconography soared to great heights during the Three Kingdoms period, inspiring wonderful works of art, particularly images of the Pensive Bodhisattva

This gilt-bronze incense burner is a remarkable example of Baekje craftsmanship, boasting many layers of Buddhist and Taoist symbolism



A hunting scene from the wall of a Goguryeo burial chamber, thought to date back to the 5th century CE

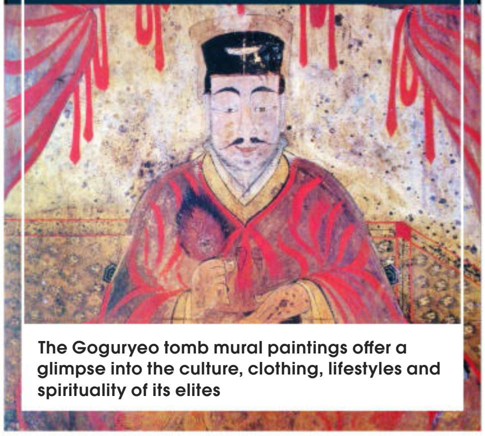
THE GOGURYEO TOMBS

While all three kingdoms had curious burial practices, Goguryeo royals and nobles began their journeys into the afterlife in the most spectacular fashion of all

Though some 10,000 Goguryeo tombs have been discovered across North Korea and China, 100 stand out from the crowd. Adorned with intricate murals, they are not only some of the few extant samples of Goguryeo tangible heritage, but among the most fascinating from across the Three Kingdoms.

While most Goguryeo burial chambers were built of stone and covered with soil, they ranged from single chambers to elaborate multi-chambered tombs, utilising advanced engineering to support heavy ceilings. One, for example, features an entrance room, an antechamber with two side chambers and then a main chamber at the rear, all connected by corridors – a veritable underground palace, designed for a dead couple.

Inside such tombs, walls were adorned with remarkable murals, depicting the deceased, their loved ones, their accomplishments, their nature, their clothing, their food, their passions and their fates. Moments from their lives were captured, with colourful snapshots of hunting expeditions, wrestling bouts, battles, their staff and their homes. Inside the main chamber, each wall was adorned with one of the four Goguryeo deities – the Azure Dragon of the East, the White Tiger of the West, the Vermillion Phoenix of the South, and the Tortoise and Snake of the North. Ceilings would be decorated with celestial and natural imagery, complete with flying fish, birds, three-legged crows, toads and anthropomorphic cows.



The Goguryeo tomb mural paintings offer a glimpse into the culture, clothing, lifestyles and spirituality of its elites

compromise all leaders agreed on – a process augmented by the hwarang education system, which trained young aristocrats to become the leaders and generals of tomorrow.

In the ensuing two centuries, the spirit of hwarangdo instilled the Silla with a strict warrior code, whereby death in battle was preferable to the shame of retreat. One story tells of a general who, on the verge of losing his fortress, made a desperate suicidal charge towards the Baekje, only to hit a pagoda tree and die.

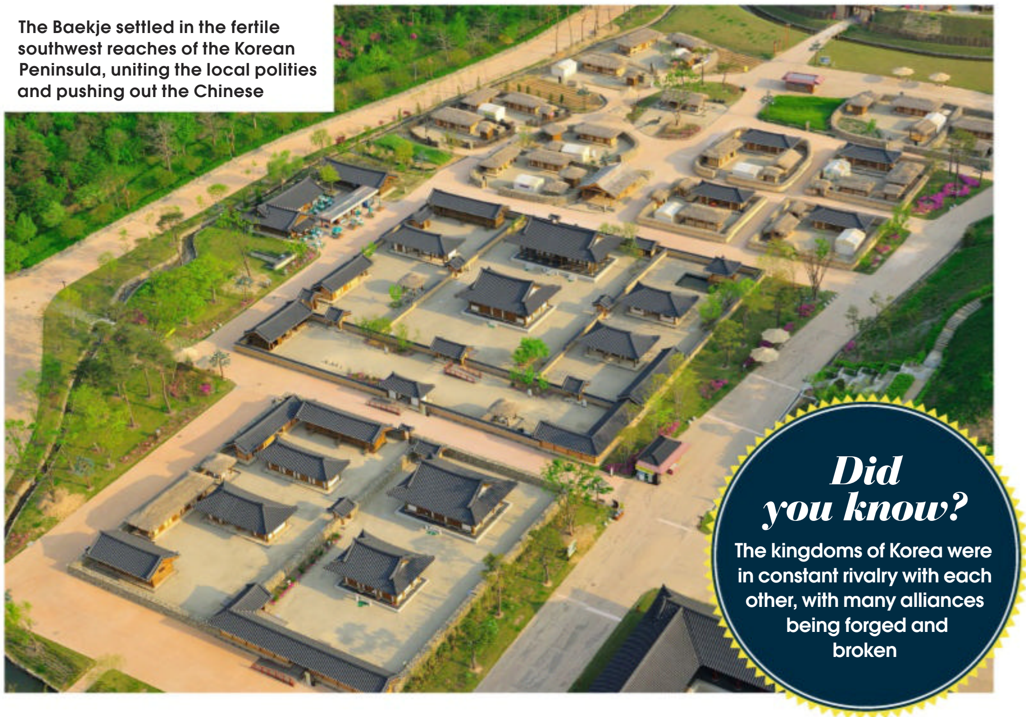
The kolp'um, or 'bone-rank', system, meanwhile, divided the ruling class into five strata, followed by commoners. Each specific caste had its own hereditary socio-economic role to play in the service of the state and community. This pre-determination governed every aspect of daily life, down to the use of utensils. Such social rigidity neutered the forces of ambition and factionalism, proving a powerful tool for incorporating new chiefdoms, while also maintaining national unity.

The spread of Buddhism was accompanied by a spate of great works, such as the Baekje's remarkable wooden pagoda at Mireuksa Temple

By the 6th century, the Silla had already begun building warships, and boosting agricultural output with the development of ox ploughs. However, the advent of Buddhism, which had long taken root among their peasant populace, heralded a time of great reform as the Silla cast off old 'barbaric' traditions, such as burying children alive alongside dead kings. The grand chieftain changed his title to the Chinese ideogram 'wang', or 'king', and formally named his kingdom Silla – a Chinese proverb meaning 'the newer the virtue, the broader the rule'.

They also began making paper and developed an intricate knowledge of astronomy, building Cheomseongdae, the world's oldest surviving observatory. Around this time, the Three Kingdoms adopted Chinese metallurgy and ceramics methods. The Baekje produced high-quality steel weapons and tools with heating and water-quenching, utilising an advanced bellows

> "WHILE THE GOGURYEO LOVED SONG AND DANCE, THE BAEKJE WERE FOND OF ARCHERY AND LETTER-WRITING"

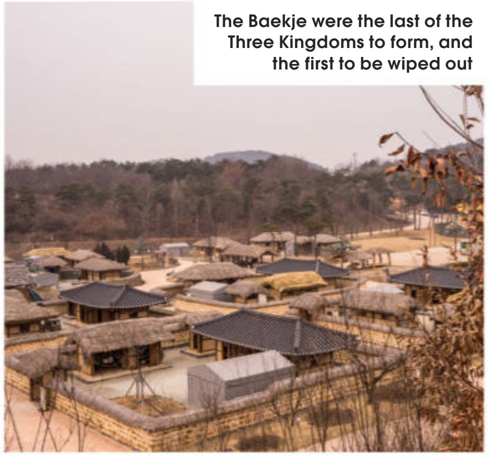


The Baekje settled in the fertile southwest reaches of the Korean Peninsula, uniting the local polities and pushing out the Chinese

Did you know?

The kingdoms of Korea were in constant rivalry with each other, with many alliances being forged and broken

The Baekje sent numerous monks to Yamato Japan, playing a crucial role in the spread of Buddhism



The Baekje were the last of the Three Kingdoms to form, and the first to be wiped out

system, and replacing casting with forging. Meanwhile, the quality of Silla ornamental craftsmanship earned it the moniker 'the Country of Gold'. One bronze bowl, created in celebration of the Goguryeo king, Gwanggaeto the Great, was discovered in a Silla tomb 100 years after its production, highlighting the flow of culture and goods between the rival powers. The former low-fired, plain and coarse style of pottery was also replaced by dojil stoneware, which was high-fired, wheel-thrown and greyish-blue.

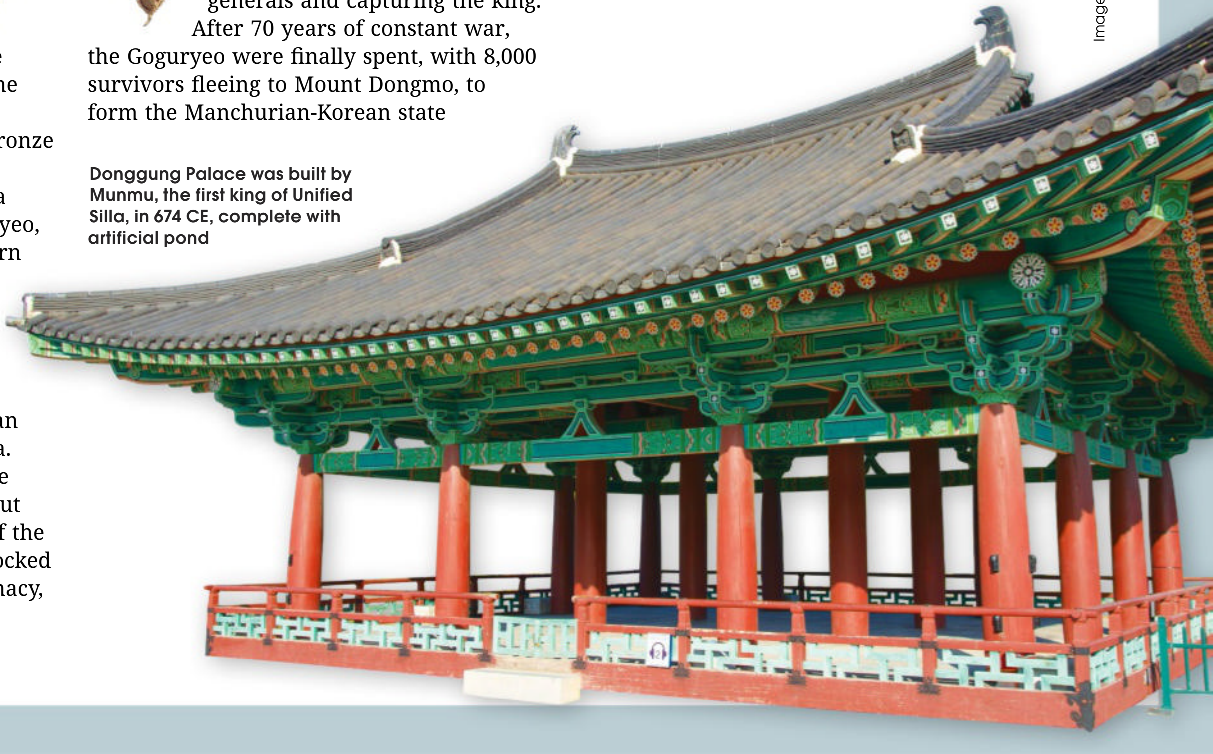
While the Goguryeo loved song and dance, the Baekje were fond of archery and letter-writing. All three kingdoms celebrated their new faith by commissioning grand buildings and artworks, infusing Chinese inspiration with indigenous flair; from the towering pagodas of Mireuksa Temple to Pensive Bodhisattva, a remarkable gilt-bronze statue almost one metre in height.

These earrings from the Silla kingdom show the high level of craftsmanship in the kingdom

Though the Silla had previously been a vassal under the protection of the Goguryeo, when a succession crisis hit their northern overlords, they struck while the iron was hot and declared their independence. In 532, they teamed up with the Baekje to subjugate the Gaya, and just two decades later they would betray their erstwhile ally, seizing the Han River Valley in the heart of the peninsula. The Baekje king was so infuriated that he launched a frenzied attack – only to be cut down and defeated. With the Gaya out of the picture, the remaining three kingdoms locked horns in an existentialist war for supremacy, each desperately attempting to curry favour with China.

Of the three, the Silla were the most adept diplomats, allying with the resurgent Tang dynasty in 648. Having defeated the Western Turks in 657, the Tang threw their weight behind the Silla – simultaneously attacking the troublesome Goguryeo, and helping to overcome the Baekje and their Yamato allies in 660. Thousands of Baekje nobles, priests, scholars, craftsmen and refugees fled to Japan, rather than live beneath the Silla yoke. Eight years later, after some back and forth, the Silla and Tang surrounded Pyongyang, killing scores of generals and capturing the king. After 70 years of constant war, the Goguryeo were finally spent, with 8,000 survivors fleeing to Mount Dongmo, to form the Manchurian-Korean state of Parhae, which was ruled over by former Goguryeo aristocrats.

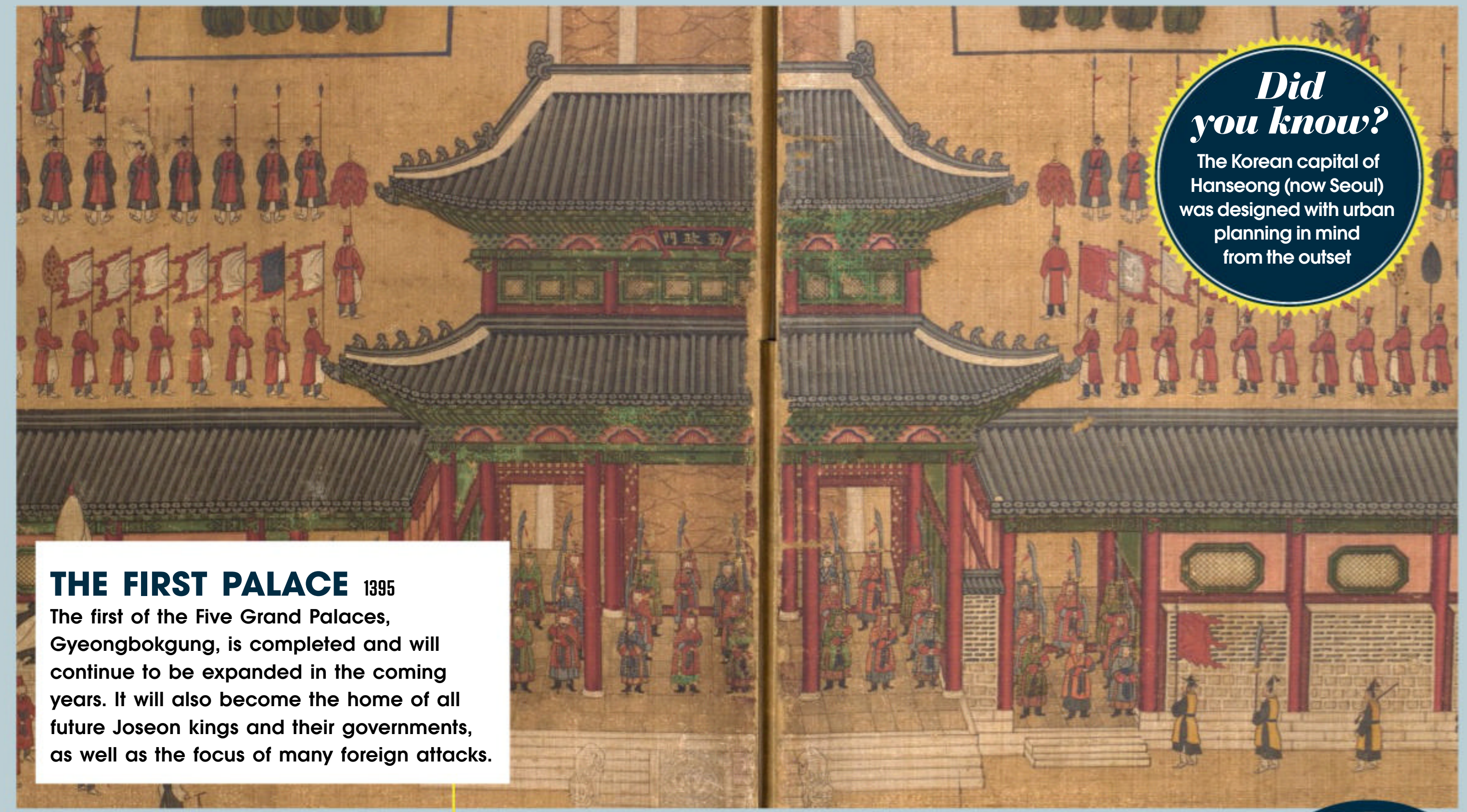
When it became apparent the Tang had merely used the Silla to pave the way for their own conquest of the peninsula, the two powers turned on each other. A unanimous Silla victory in 676 finally handed them control of the southern two-thirds of the peninsula. For more than three centuries, the Silla ruled in peace and prosperity, continuing to adopt Chinese customs, legal institutions and administrative models – fashioning a Chinese-style state with the help of the Tang, while protecting their indigenous culture. Silla monks, scholars and merchants travelled to China and India, making their mark on the world and learning from it. However, in the 10th century, intellectuals began to grow resentful of the hereditary bias of the bone-rank system. Joining with regional magnates, they rebelled, throwing the country into civil war, and tearing it into three once again: Later Silla, Later Goguryeo and Later Baekje. Through a combination of deft military ability and diplomatic clout, a Later Goguryeo magnate-general emerged supreme, creating the Goryeo dynasty, from which modern Korea takes its name.



Donggung Palace was built by Munmu, the first king of Unified Silla, in 674 CE, complete with artificial pond

Image source: Alamy; Getty Images

HISTORY OF JOSEON KOREA



THE FIRST PALACE 1395

The first of the Five Grand Palaces, Gyeongbokgung, is completed and will continue to be expanded in the coming years. It will also become the home of all future Joseon kings and their governments, as well as the focus of many foreign attacks.

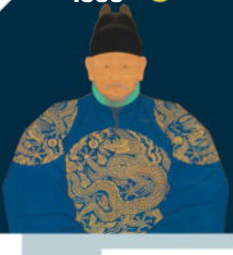
Did you know?

The Korean capital of Hanseong (now Seoul) was designed with urban planning in mind from the outset

1388 1420 1592 1627

A DYNASTY FALLS 1388

General Yi Seong-gye is ordered to attack Chinese troops on the border of the Goryeo Kingdom, but instead decides to lead his troops against his own leaders.

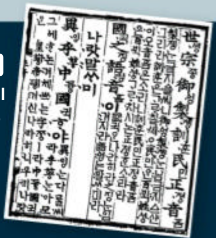


A NEW KING 1392

Yi Seong-gye is victorious and crowned as the first king of a new Joseon Dynasty. He is given the honorific title Taejo, which translates to Great Progenitor.

HALL OF WORTHIES 1420

King Sejong establishes the Hall of Worthies, a research institute dedicated to the exploration of new ideas that could strengthen the kingdom.

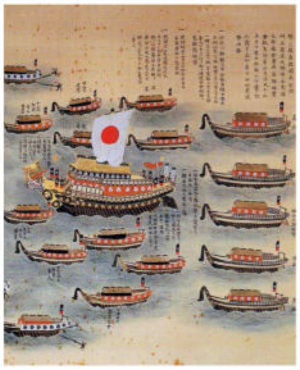


A NEW ALPHABET 1446

The greatest achievement of the Hall of Worthies is the Hunminjeongeum document introducing a new alphabet, Hangul. This is now promoted around Joseon Korea.

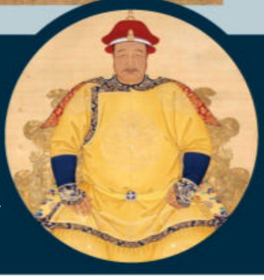
JAPAN INVADES 1592

A samurai invasion lead by Toyotomi Hideyoshi seeks to invade the Korean peninsula. Lasting for six years, the Japanese are finally repelled with aid from China's Ming Dynasty, as well as the formation of civilian militias known as righteous armies.



FIRST MANCHU INVASION 1627

Following Joseon support for the Ming Dynasty, the Later Jin of Manchuria invade in retaliation. After three months of fighting they make Korea a tributary state.

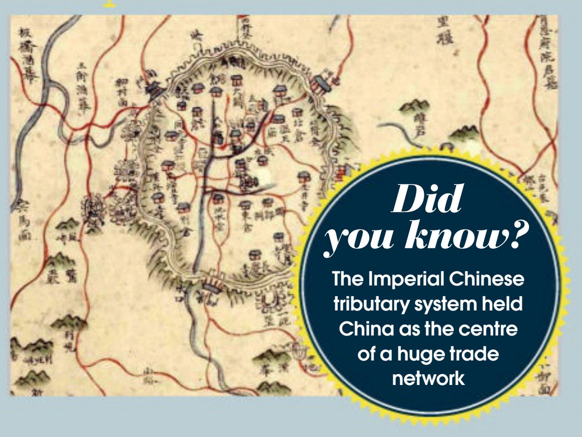


SECOND MANCHU INVASION 1636

The newly formed Qing Dynasty of Manchuria invades the Korean peninsula again, with the intention of ending the relationship between Joseon Korea and Ming China once and for all. This cements the Qing Dynasty as the centre of the Imperial Chinese tributary system.

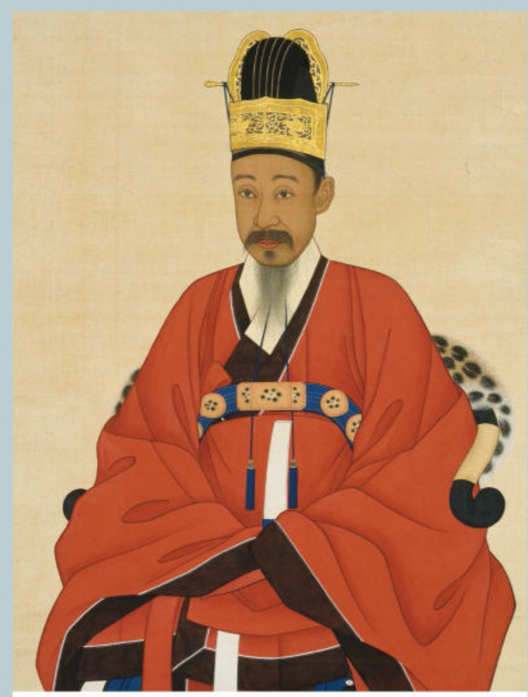
A DUTCH VISITOR 1653

A Dutch ship captained by Hendrick Hamel wrecks on the island of Jeju and he spends 13 years in Korea, becoming the first European to report back on the Joseon Dynasty when he returns.



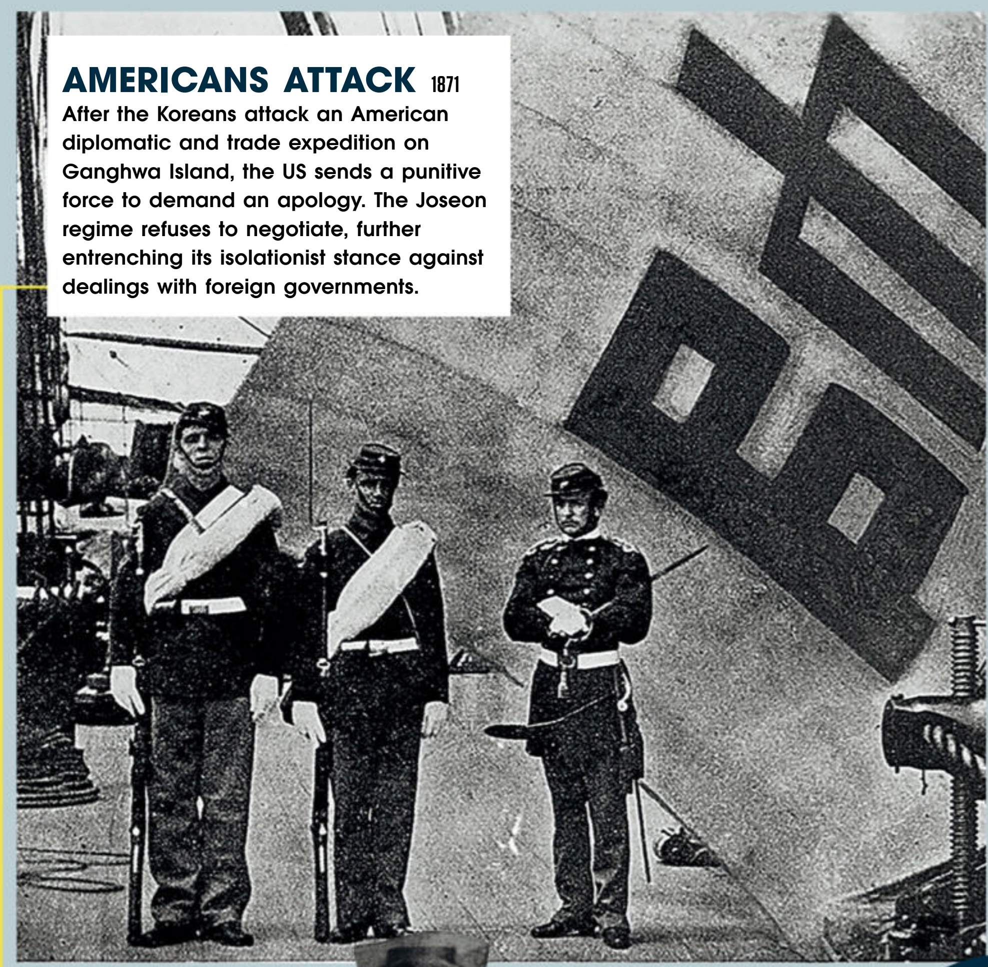
Did you know?

The Imperial Chinese tributary system held China as the centre of a huge trade network



THE LAST REGENT 1864

Aged 11, King Gojong is crowned king with his father, Heungseon Daewongun, as regent. Daewongun begins an isolationist policy, summed up as, "No treaties, no trade, no Catholics, no West and no Japan." He was, however, in favour of closer ties with China.



AMERICANS ATTACK 1871

After the Koreans attack an American diplomatic and trade expedition on Ganghwa Island, the US sends a punitive force to demand an apology. The Joseon regime refuses to negotiate, further entrenching its isolationist stance against dealings with foreign governments.

1801

1864

THE SINYU PERSECUTION 1801

A mass persecution of Korean Catholics is started by Queen Jeongsun during the reign of King Sunjo. By its end over 300 Catholics will have been executed.

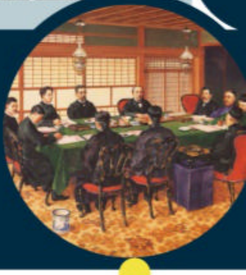
ST. PAUL CHONG HA-SANG

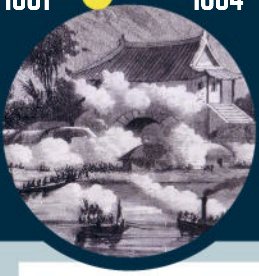
GAPSIN COUP 1884

With China and Japan at war and each vying for influence on Korea another uprising backed by the Japanese occurs, lead by reformer Kim Ok-gyun. A Chinese garrison is deployed to suppress it.

TREATY OF SHIMONOSEKI 1895

Korea's independence from China is recognised after centuries of a tributary relationship when China and Japan sign the Treaty of Shimonoseki. However, Japan's influence increases.





FRENCH ATTACK 1866

After the execution of seven French missionaries, a punitive force is sent to seek retribution against Korea. The conflict lasts six weeks before the French are repelled.

DONGHAK REBELLION 1894

Restrictions on the Donghak religion in west Korea lead to an uprising. China sends support, but upsets Japan in the process, contributing to the First Sino-Japanese War.

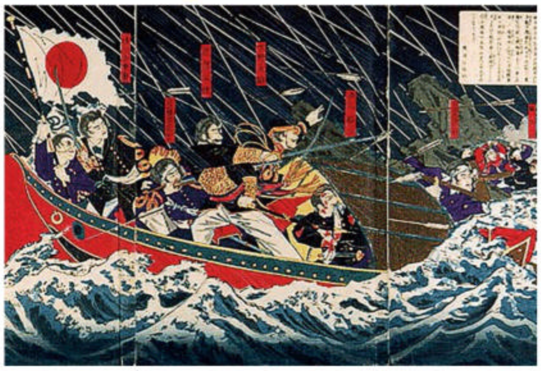
THE QUEEN ASSASSINATED 1895

Having opposed Japanese influence in Korea and seeking a closer relationship with Russia, Queen Min is assassinated by Japanese agents. King Gojong flees the palace.

THE IMO INCIDENT

1882

Having forced the retirement of his father, King Gojong begins a programme of rapid modernisation with Japanese aid. Korean soldiers protest against this with a mutiny and riot in the capital Hanseong. Government officials are killed and buildings destroyed before the uprising is quelled.



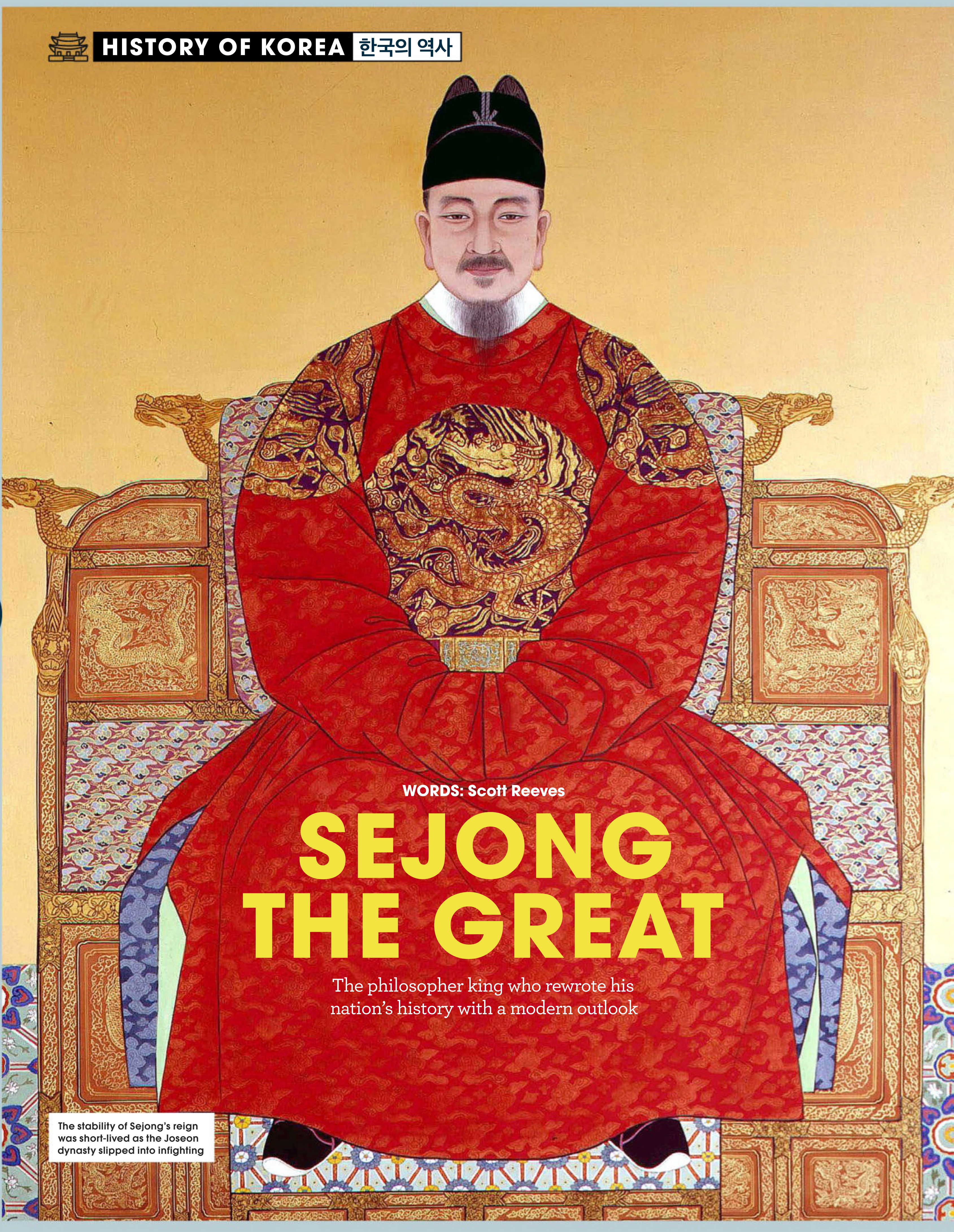
THE GREAT KOREAN EMPIRE 1897

Returning to his palace, King Gojong declares the founding of the Great Korean Empire, making him the first emperor of this new regime and bringing the Joseon Dynasty to an end along with all ties to Qing China.

Did you know?

By naming itself an empire, Korea declared it was now equal to China's Qing Dynasty

Image source: Wiki\Wikifrits



WORDS: Scott Reeves

SEJONG THE GREAT

The philosopher king who rewrote his nation's history with a modern outlook

The stability of Sejong's reign was short-lived as the Joseon dynasty slipped into infighting

The statue of Sejong in Seoul is one of the South Korean capital's best-known landmarks

Many nobles opposed Sejong's new writing system, fearing a backlash from newly literate peasants

Sejong has been featured on the 10,000 won banknote in Korea

The Joseon dynasty underwent a mini dynastic crisis under King Taejong. He regarded his oldest son as unfit to succeed, but when the heir was removed from his position, Taejong's second son was having none of it – he fled to a monastery and declared his intention to become a monk. That left Taejong's third son as the unexpected heir. Thankfully, Sejong would prove an inspired choice.

Taejong ensured Sejong's succession by purging his palace of any opponents and abdicating early. Upon taking charge, the new King Sejong cracked down on his biggest critics: the Buddhists. He redistributed temple lands and closed five of seven Buddhist schools. Instead, the Chinese idea of Confucianism became the chosen faith. Sejong was also interested in science and technology and created a royal institute called the Hall of Worthies to fund and encourage research. Despite so many clever minds working under him, perhaps the greatest achievement to come as a result of Sejong's reign – a new, phonetic writing system – came from the pen of Sejong himself. With Sejong's invention, Korean writing was no longer a complicated and difficult-to-learn offshoot of Chinese script, but a bespoke solution that boosted Korean literacy levels. Sejong's modern, technology-driven Korea became an early tiger economy. New agricultural techniques were introduced that benefited from Korean inventions like more accurate water clocks and sundials. Thanks to burgeoning food supplies, Korea underwent an economic boom. Sejong further stimulated growth by replacing Korea's barter economy with one modelled on a national currency, the tongbo. Using his new coins, Sejong introduced a new taxation system and used its proceeds to fund a welfare state that even paid for slaves to have maternity leave.

With Sejong's reforms, Korea became a tempting target for foreign powers, especially Tang China. To defend his borders, Sejong reinforced his military, encouraging his armies to make use of new technologies like cannons and gunpowder. He pushed troublesome Japanese pirates from islands in the Tsushima Strait and had his generals lead expeditions to the north.

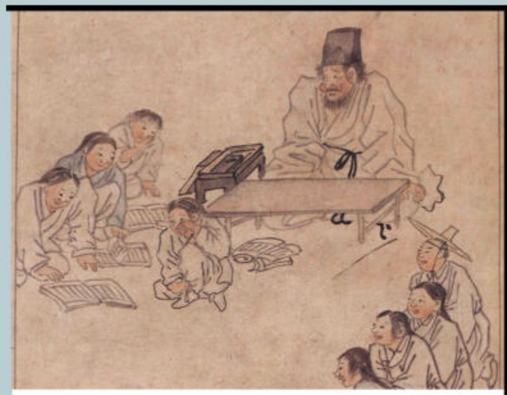
Did you know?

South Korea's administrative capital, Sejong City, is a self-governing city named after the king

Image source: Getty Images, Shutterstock

JOSEON KOREANS

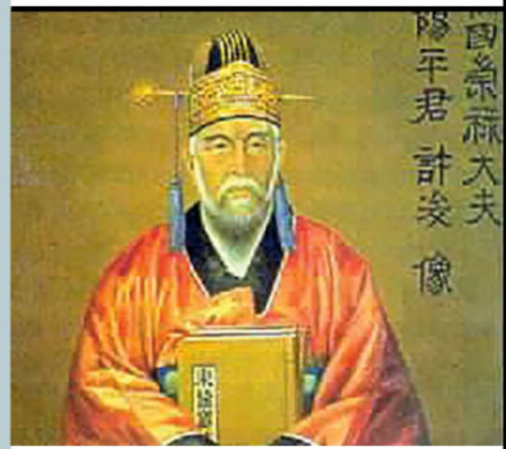
From kings to poets, meet ten of the dynasty's most fascinating figures



KIM HONG-DO

c.1745-c.1806

Also known by his artist name Danwon, Kim Hong-do was a renowned court painter from the Joseon Dynasty. He painted landscapes, animals, portraits, and Buddhist and Daoist themes, but his genre paintings were his most famous works, focusing on the working class and their everyday activities. These lively, candid paintings were greatly admired for their natural depictions of emotion and Hong-do is widely credited for starting a new trend in Joseon art.


崇祿大夫
陽平君 許浚 像

HEO JUN

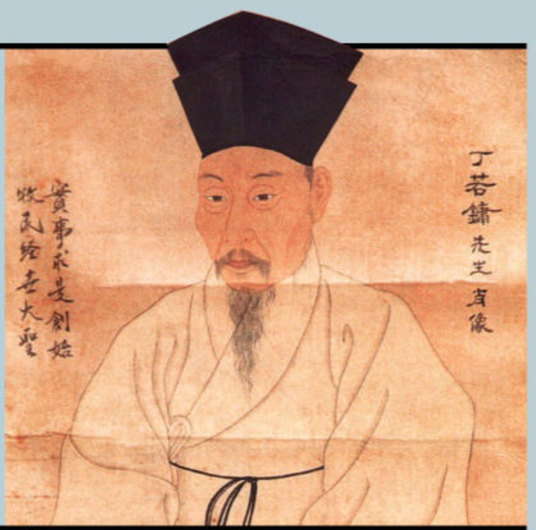
1546-1615

Heo Jun was an acclaimed physician and scholar at the court of King Seonjo. He was asked to create an encyclopedia of medical knowledge that could be published and given to the people, but he was exiled by jealous officials after Seonjo's death in 1608. Nonetheless, Heo Jun continued the project privately and produced the Dongui Bogam, which was considered the defining text of traditional Korean medicine and is still influencing Eastern medicine today.

JEONG YAK-YONG

1762-1836

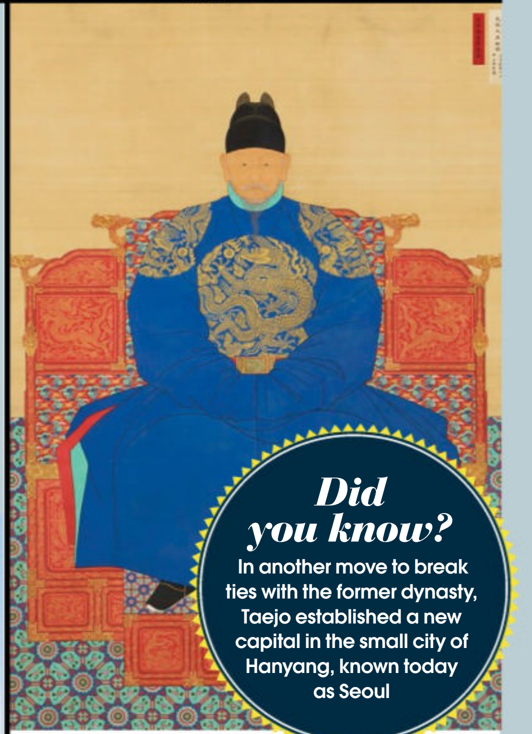
Usually remembered by his pen name Dasan, Jeong Yak-yong was one of the greatest thinkers of the Joseon Dynasty. He passed the state exam to become a high-ranking official at the age of 28 and was a trusted advisor and confidant of King Jeongjo, who asked him to design Hwaseong Fortress. In 1801, Yak-yong was accused of associating with Catholics and was subsequently exiled by his rivals to Gangjin, in the South Jeolla province, for the next 18 years. However, Yak-yong wrote a number of his major works while in exile, focusing on topics such as politics, ethics and reform.



KING SEJONG

1397-1450

Best remembered by his epithet 'the Great', King Sejong was known for appointing people from all social classes as civil servants. Under his rule, the Korean Renaissance occurred, with numerous technological advances and the establishment of a royal research institute, the Hall of Worthies, in 1420. Sejong also strengthened the military, reformed the Korean calendar and is credited with inventing the phonetic alphabet, Hangul, so commoners could learn to read and write. His government also introduced maternity leave for female servants at public offices. The king was unwell in his final years and so his son, Crown Prince Munjong, acted as his regent.



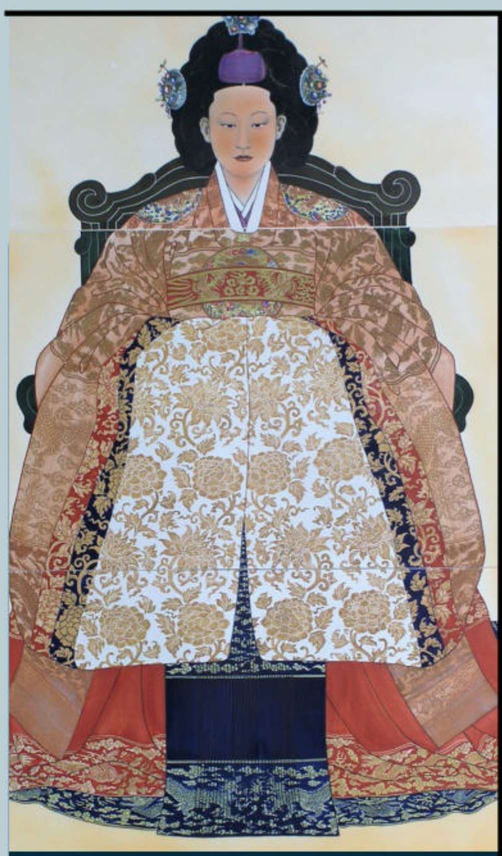
Did you know?

In another move to break ties with the former dynasty, Taejo established a new capital in the small city of Hanyang, known today as Seoul

KING TAEJO

1335-1408

Successfully overthrowing the Goryeo Dynasty after launching a coup, General Yi Seong-gye founded the new Joseon Dynasty as King Taejo in 1392. His ascension ushered in the rise of Neo-Confucianism and improved relations with the Ming Dynasty in China, which had previously supported his faction in the Goryeo court. In 1398, Taejo abdicated after becoming frustrated with his sons, who were fighting over who would succeed him. He died ten years later in Changdeokgung Palace.



EMPRESS MYEONGSEONG

1851-1895

Queen Min, consort of King Gojong, opposed Japan's grip over Joseon Korea following the former's victory in the first Sino-Japanese war. She tried to counter Japan's imperial ambitions by advocating a pro-Russian policy and therefore was seen as a threat to the Japanese and their plans to annex Korea. In October 1895 the queen was brutally assassinated in Gyeongbokgung Palace and her body was burned, leaving the nation shocked. She was posthumously given the title Empress Myeongseong when her husband became Emperor of Korea.

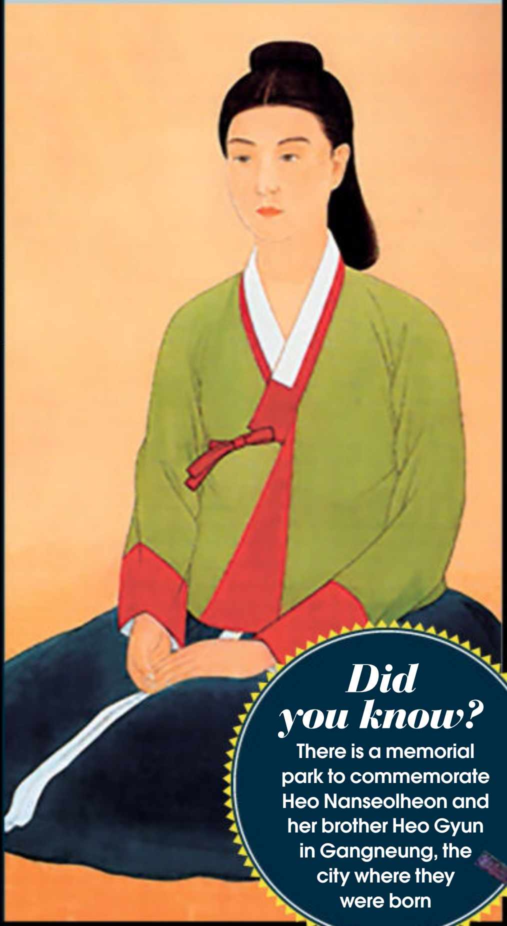
DID YOU KNOW?

AFTER FORMALLY ANNOUNCING THE KOREAN EMPIRE IN 1897, EMPEROR GOJONG FINALLY GAVE HIS WIFE THE STATE FUNERAL SHE DESERVED.

HEO NANSEOLHEON

1563-1589

Heo Nanseolheon was a talented poet who, at just eight years old, wrote Inscriptions On The Ridge Pole Of The White Jade Pavilion In The Gwanghan Palace, which was considered a work of poetic genius. Much of her poetry was influenced by her life – in particular her unhappy marriage – but her work was cut short when she passed away at the age of 27. Nanseolheon had asked her brother, Heo Gyun, to burn her poems after her death but, thankfully, he did not destroy them all. They were later published posthumously, becoming popular in China and Japan in the 18th century.



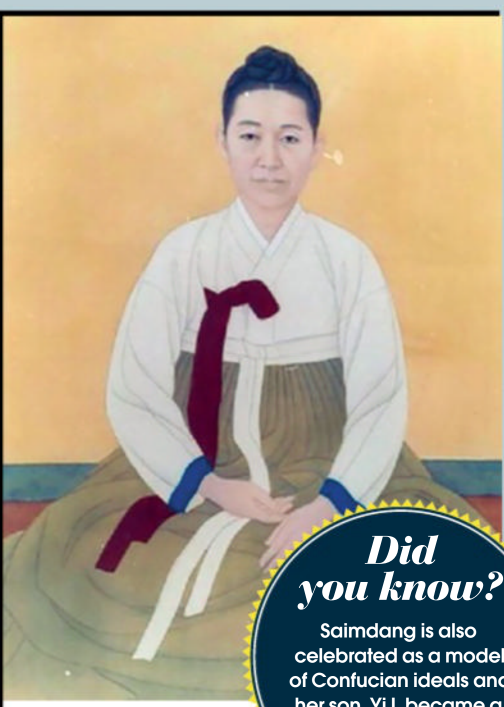
Did you know?

There is a memorial park to commemorate Heo Nanseolheon and her brother Heo Gyun in Gangneung, the city where they were born

JANG YEONG-SIL

c.1390-c.1443

One of Joseon's best scientists and inventors, Jang Yeong-sil was a peasant who rose through the government to become the chief court engineer under King Sejong. He contributed to the development of Korean weapons and produced many inventions, including a celestial globe, a sundial and a self-striking water clock, which became the standard timepiece across the country. In 1441 he developed his most famous invention, the cheugugi, a rain gauge. In



Did you know?

Saimdang is also celebrated as a model of Confucian ideals and her son, Yi I, became a prominent Confucian scholar

SHIN SAIMDANG

1504-1551

One of the most famous women in Korean history, Shin Saimdang was a writer, artist and calligraphist who is best remembered for her delicate paintings, which included landscapes, insects and plants. Her father ensured that she received an education that was usually only given to boys, and when he arranged her marriage he chose a husband who would not interfere with her art. In 2009, she became the first woman to appear on a Korean banknote.

GYEONGBOKGUNG PALACE

Seoul, South Korea, 1395 – Present

The story of Gyeongbokgung is full of splendour and hardship. As the largest of the Five Grand Palaces that were constructed by the Joseon Dynasty it was the primary residence and seat of government for most of the era, but that also made it the target of numerous attacks right up to the early 20th century.

The first parts of Gyeongbokgung, which translates as Palace of the Crown Prince, were built in 1395 in what is now northern Seoul about three years into the reign of King Taejo, but it continued to expand in the years that followed.

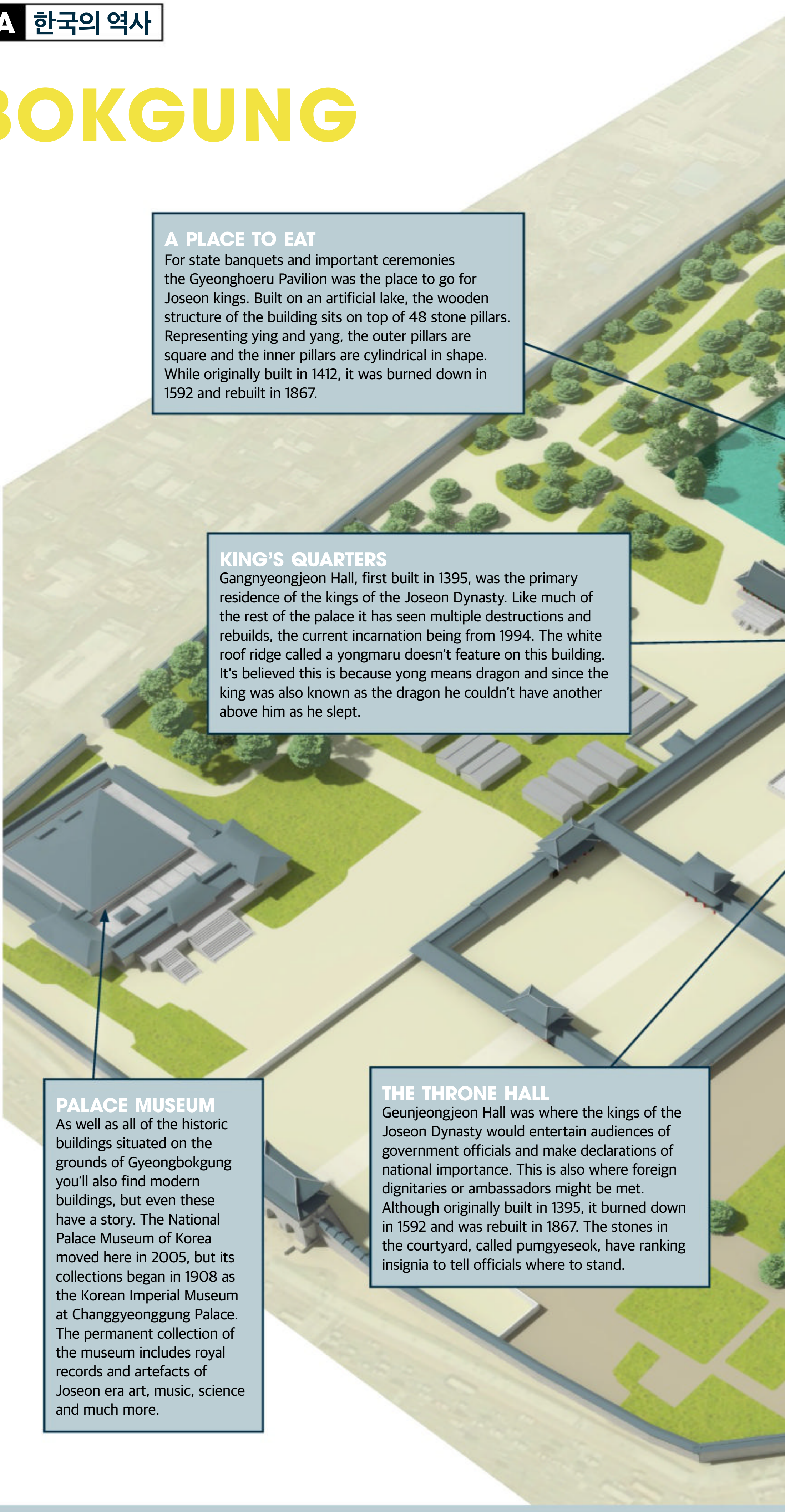
Much of the site has now been given protected UNESCO status, but many parts have been through several reconstructions as a result of damage either accidental or deliberate. The first such incident of note were fires around 1553 that destroyed several major buildings, but these were restored the following year.

What followed 40 years later was a lot tougher to recover from, namely the Japanese invasions lead by Toyotomi Hideyoshi between 1592–1598 (known as the Imjin War). The destruction of property at Gyeongbokgung was significant enough that the Joseon kings left the palace and moved to Changdeokgung instead, leaving Gyeongbokgung abandoned for 273 years.

The royal family did finally return in 1867 and the palace was restored to its former glory at the behest of Prince Regent Heungseon during the reign of King Gojong. Three hundred and thirty buildings and 5,792 rooms were restored.

However, when Queen Min was assassinated by Japanese agents in 1895, King Gojong left the palace and the Joseon Dynasty would never return. Years of Japanese occupation from 1910 onwards saw more buildings torn down, often for materials to be used elsewhere, but a process of restoration has been ongoing since 1989 and about 40 per cent of the site is now believed to have been completed.

> “MUCH OF THE SITE HAS NOW BEEN GIVEN PROTECTED UNESCO STATUS”



A PLACE TO EAT

For state banquets and important ceremonies the Gyeonghoeru Pavilion was the place to go for Joseon kings. Built on an artificial lake, the wooden structure of the building sits on top of 48 stone pillars. Representing ying and yang, the outer pillars are square and the inner pillars are cylindrical in shape. While originally built in 1412, it was burned down in 1592 and rebuilt in 1867.

KING’S QUARTERS

Gangnyeongjeon Hall, first built in 1395, was the primary residence of the kings of the Joseon Dynasty. Like much of the rest of the palace it has seen multiple destructions and rebuilds, the current incarnation being from 1994. The white roof ridge called a yongmaru doesn’t feature on this building. It’s believed this is because yong means dragon and since the king was also known as the dragon he couldn’t have another above him as he slept.

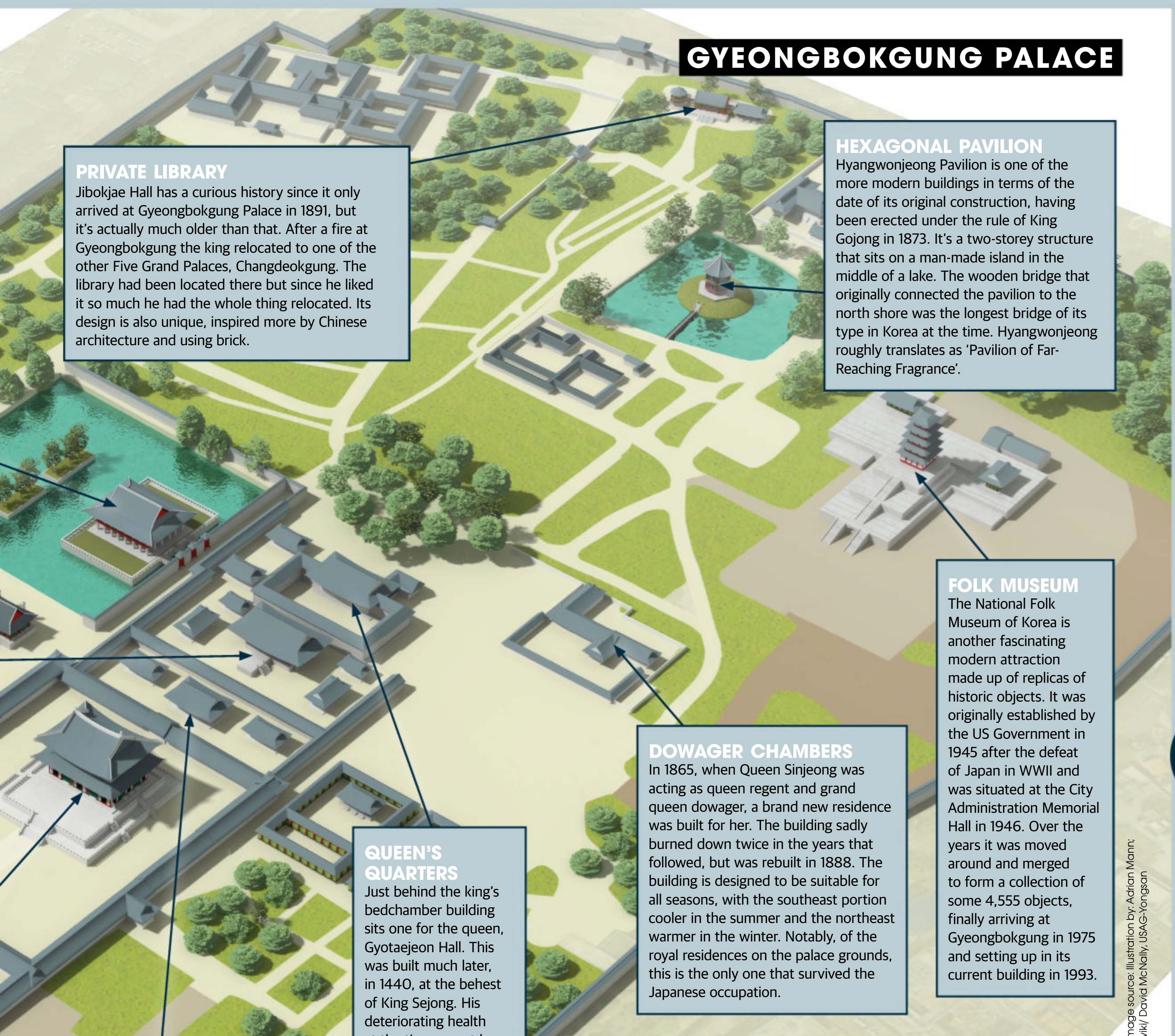
PALACE MUSEUM

As well as all of the historic buildings situated on the grounds of Gyeongbokgung you’ll also find modern buildings, but even these have a story. The National Palace Museum of Korea moved here in 2005, but its collections began in 1908 as the Korean Imperial Museum at Changgyeonggung Palace. The permanent collection of the museum includes royal records and artefacts of Joseon era art, music, science and much more.

THE THRONE HALL

Geunjeongjeon Hall was where the kings of the Joseon Dynasty would entertain audiences of government officials and make declarations of national importance. This is also where foreign dignitaries or ambassadors might be met. Although originally built in 1395, it burned down in 1592 and was rebuilt in 1867. The stones in the courtyard, called pumgyeseok, have ranking insignia to tell officials where to stand.

GYEONGBOKGUNG PALACE



PRIVATE LIBRARY

Jibokjae Hall has a curious history since it only arrived at Gyeongbokgung Palace in 1891, but it's actually much older than that. After a fire at Gyeongbokgung the king relocated to one of the other Five Grand Palaces, Changdeokgung. The library had been located there but since he liked it so much he had the whole thing relocated. Its design is also unique, inspired more by Chinese architecture and using brick.

HEXAGONAL PAVILION

Hyangwonjeong Pavilion is one of the more modern buildings in terms of the date of its original construction, having been erected under the rule of King Gojong in 1873. It's a two-storey structure that sits on a man-made island in the middle of a lake. The wooden bridge that originally connected the pavilion to the north shore was the longest bridge of its type in Korea at the time. Hyangwonjeong roughly translates as 'Pavilion of Far-Reaching Fragrance'.

FOLK MUSEUM

The National Folk Museum of Korea is another fascinating modern attraction made up of replicas of historic objects. It was originally established by the US Government in 1945 after the defeat of Japan in WWII and was situated at the City Administration Memorial Hall in 1946. Over the years it was moved around and merged to form a collection of some 4,555 objects, finally arriving at Gyeongbokgung in 1975 and setting up in its current building in 1993.

DOWAGER CHAMBERS

In 1865, when Queen Sinjeong was acting as queen regent and grand queen dowager, a brand new residence was built for her. The building sadly burned down twice in the years that followed, but was rebuilt in 1888. The building is designed to be suitable for all seasons, with the southeast portion cooler in the summer and the northeast warmer in the winter. Notably, of the royal residences on the palace grounds, this is the only one that survived the Japanese occupation.

QUEEN'S QUARTERS

Just behind the king's bedchamber building sits one for the queen, Gyotaejeon Hall. This was built much later, in 1440, at the behest of King Sejong. His deteriorating health at the time meant he was conducting more and more executive business from his bed and to give his wife more privacy he had a residence built just for her. Like Gangnyeongjeon Hall, it was torn down for parts by the Japanese in 1920 and rebuilt in 1994.

MAIN OFFICE

Sajeongjeon Hall was the main executive office of the king where the main duties of the ruler and his officials took place. This is also where meetings with government were held. The two buildings that sit beside it employ an underfloor heating system called an ondol that uses wood smoke to warm up the masonry flooring above. This way the executive office was comfortable all year round.

The palace hosts reenactments of historic events

Image source: Illustration by: Adrian Mann; wiki/ David McNally, USAG-Yongsan

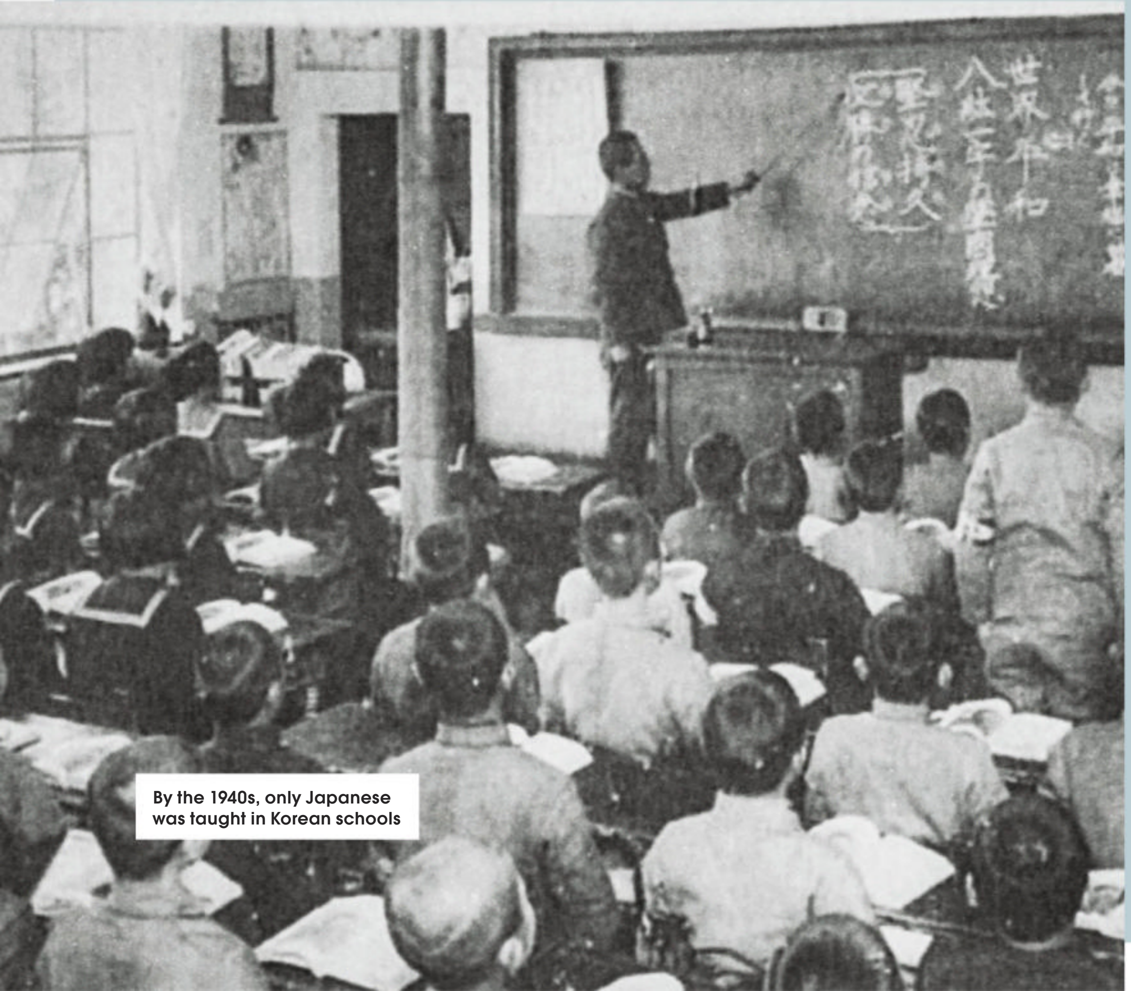
WORDS: Mark Dolan

THE COLONISATION OF KOREA

For 35 years, the colonial Japanese government decimated and oppressed Korea's culture and people

In 1905, the Russo-Japanese War, fought over the control of strategic port locations in East Asia, came to an end with the signing of the Treaty of Portsmouth. This treaty, signed in the USA and partly brokered by then-president, Teddy Roosevelt, recognised Japan as the dominant presence in Korea. The treaty enabled Japan to force Korea to sign a protectorate treaty two months later, ceding its right to manage its own foreign affairs. A consequence of this treaty also meant installing a Japanese resident-general to advise on all aspects of domestic policy.

The man appointed to this role was the statesman Itō Hirobumi, who negotiated the terms of the treaty himself. As this treaty had been forced on Korea, with the Korean Imperial palace – Gyeongbokgung – occupied by Japanese troops at the time of the signing, Emperor Gojong sent a delegation to the Hague to alert the West of Japan's actions. Gojong's plot was discovered and the emperor was forced to abdicate in 1907, replaced by his son, Sunjong. Just a few days after Sunjong's ascension, Japan forced another treaty on Korea, stripping away the Korean government's right to handle internal affairs. The resident-general, Itō, was given sole responsibility for the appointment of high-ranking officials. It was the assassination of Itō, however, that ended the Protectorate Period. Itō had a comparatively moderate approach to the governance of Korea and did not wish for its annexation. Despite this, he was targeted by a member of the Korean independence movement, An Chung-gŭ, and assassinated on 26 October 1909. On hearing he was the victim of a political assassination, he declared "he is a fool!" as he'd targeted one of the most sympathetic of Japan's political leaders.



By the 1940s, only Japanese was taught in Korean schools

After Itō's assassination, he was replaced, briefly, by another anti-annexation politician, Sone Arasuke. Sone was forced to resign through illness just seven months later and was replaced by Terauchi Masatake. In 1910, Japan completed the annexation of Korea with the signing of a third treaty. This agreement was signed by Resident-General Terauchi Masatake and Prime Minister Yi Wan-yong, against the emperor's wishes and despite the law requiring it to be signed by Emperor Sunjong himself. Yi (also known as Ye or Lee Wan-yong) was one of the foremost supporters of the 1905 treaty and Japanese rule, and had been instrumental in the plot to oust Emperor Gojong; his pro-Japanese views led to his promotion to the office of prime minister by Itō in 1906. Yi is considered one of the worst traitors in Korean history and his name is today synonymous with treachery. It was his signature that handed full control to Japan and heralded 35 years of suffering, destruction and suppression under colonial rule.

1910-19

Terauchi Masatake, Korea's first Governor-General, believed that Koreans would be able to fully assimilate into Japanese culture and set about reforming education in the country, founding hundreds of new schools. The

대한민국
자주독립
평화정의
자유평화
나라사랑
독립만세

The March First Independence Movement Day is a time to remember those who fought the colonial rules

> “KOREANS WERE FORBIDDEN FROM SPEAKING THEIR OWN LANGUAGE, INSTEAD BEING FORCED TO LEARN FEALTY TO THE EMPEROR”

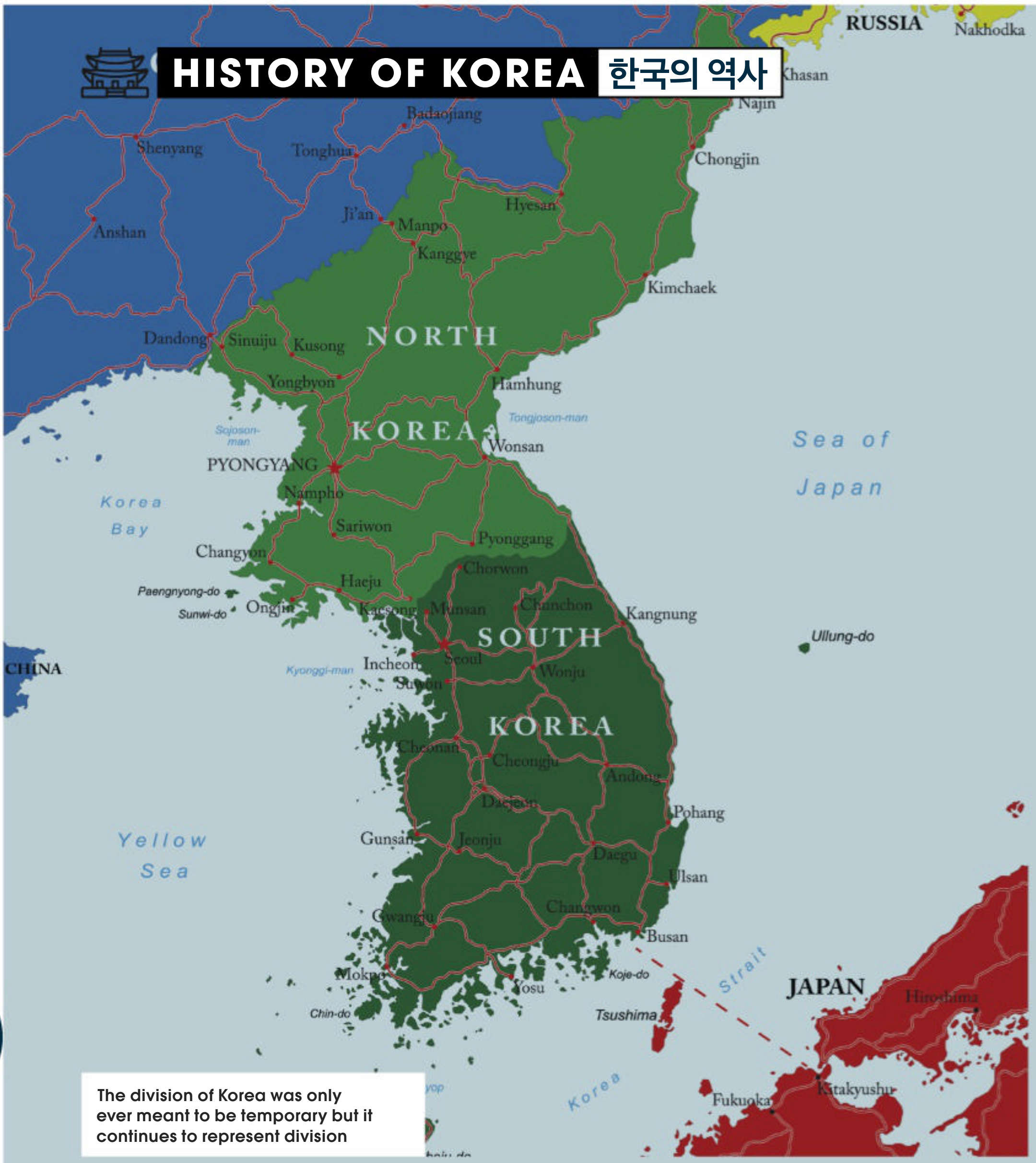
schools, though, focused almost exclusively on Japanese history and did not teach Korean language or history, beginning to erode the country’s intangible culture and heritage. There were also simply not enough schools for the population. Japanese people were given priority, and many Korean children received little to no education at all, setting them back economically and socially. Where they were educated at all, Koreans were forbidden from speaking their own language, instead being forced to learn fealty to the Emperor. Such was the extent of the effort to stop Korean history being taught, teaching from non-approved texts was banned and over 200,000 volumes of Korean history, including many ancient and influential books, were burned. In addition to the education reform, Koreans were forced to abandon their religions and follow the Japanese Shinto religion, worshipping Japanese deities and the spirits of dead emperors and war heroes.

It wasn’t just the intangible heritage of Korea – language, religion, history and so on – that the colonial government took aim at. They began destroying physical culture too. In 1915, the primary building of Gyeongbokgung Palace was destroyed to make way for the Chōsen Industrial Exhibition, held in modern Japanese-style buildings on the site to promote Japanese culture and modernity. Nine years later, the palace building was replaced by the Government-General Building, creating a visual metaphor for modern Japan’s disdain for, and erasure of, Korean history and identity.

Economically, too, there was great change and an ostensible improvement that in reality benefitted the Japanese rather than Korean population. Soon after annexation, the Japanese introduced its own Civil and Commercial Codes to Korea, making it easier for foreigners, particularly Japanese, to found new companies. The economy quickly grew, and Korean-owned businesses between 1911

Terauchi Masatake was a staunch believer in assimilating Koreans into the Japanese culture

Yu Gwan-sun was one of the organisers of the March First Declaration


RUSSIA
Nakhodka
Khasan
Najin
Badaojiang
Shenyang
Tonghua
Chongjin
Hyesan
Ji'an
Manpo
Anshan
Kanggye
Kimchaek
Dandong
Sinuiju
Kusong
NORTH
Yongbyon
Hamhung
Sojoson-man
KOREA
Tongjoson-man
Wonsan
PYONGYANG
Nampho
Sea of Japan
Korea Bay
Sariwon
Changyon
Pyonggang
Chorwon
Haeju
Paengnyong-do
Sunwi-do
Ongjin
Kaesong
Munsan
Chunchon
Kangnung
SOUTH
Ullung-do
CHINA
Kyonggi-man
Incheon
Seoul
Wonju
Suwon
KOREA
Cheonan
Cheongju
Andong
Daejeon
Pohang
Yellow Sea
Gunsan
Jeonju
Daegu
Ulsan
Gwangju
Changwon
Busan
Mokpo
Koje-do
Strait
Yosu
JAPAN
Hiroshima
Chin-do
Tsushima
Fukuoka
Kitakyushu
Korea

The division of Korea was only ever meant to be temporary but it continues to represent division

THE RENAMING OF KOREA

After annexation, Japan quickly renamed Korea to fit its assimilation narrative

For just over 500 years, from 1392 to 1897, the Korean peninsula was ruled by the Joseon Dynasty, the longest-lasting Imperial Dynasty in the country's history. In 1897, King Gojong officially changed the name of the state from Joseon to the Korean Empire, becoming, in the process, Emperor Gojong. The decision was made in part to protect Korean sovereignty from foreign powers, but also in an effort to modernise in line with the West, as this change also saw new imports, including innovative art and military uniforms, and books in English. As soon as Japan annexed Korea, its name was officially changed back to Chōsen (the Japanese reading of 'Joseon'), a name which to this day is intimately associated with the period of colonial rule.

The change to the Korean Empire created various imports, such as art, military uniforms and books in English

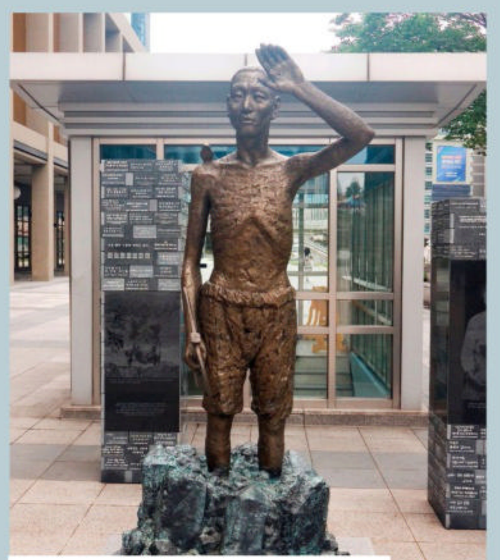
and 1929 increased from 19 to 207, though in the same period, Japanese-owned businesses increased from 58 to 470. The vast majority of investment went into the Japanese companies rather than those owned by Koreans. In 1911, the total investment in Korean business was 2.1m Korean yen, and the Japanese total was 3.5m, but by 1927, when Korean investment had reached 16m yen, total investment into Japanese businesses was as high as 164m yen. Although this economic change was comparatively subtle, the Japanese also imposed many more directly oppressive economic policies; for instance, land was increasingly given to Japanese landowners, with Koreans forced to work as tenants, shouldering heavy taxes that furthered their hardship and poverty.

MARCH FIRST MOVEMENT

The first nine years of colonial rule were harsh and brutal on the Korean people, and naturally, there were rumblings of opposition and revolution against the oppressive regime. Following the lead set by US President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, Korean nationalists drafted a document declaring Korea an independent nation on 1 March 1919. It was signed by 33 Korean leaders, including representatives from Christian, Buddhist and Cheondogyo (the indigenous Korean religion) communities. Protests soon erupted, with over half a million Koreans joining protests in Seoul on 3 March where they were gathered for Emperor Gojong's funeral procession. The Japanese governors responded with force, killing 553 people, injuring a further 1,409 and arresting a total of 26,713 people, including the declaration's signatories, in the first two months of the movement. It took the Japanese a year to fully quell the uprising, which saw over 1,500 demonstrations across the country, and the fallout heralded a change in approach for the colonial government, from the militaristic rule of the first decade to a softer 'cultural rule', albeit one that saw Korean culture, language and history continue to be suppressed and erased.

1920-45

In reality, the brief era of Japanese cultural rule was little better than the military rule of the first few years. Some rules were relaxed; censorship was loosened from the requirement to obtain permission to publish in advance to inspection after publication. This allowed many new magazines to pop up, including some with nationalist ideology, but many quickly folded



This statue commemorates the hundreds of thousands of Koreans forced into slave labour under colonisation

Koreans had to face more hardship after the Japanese occupation because of the Korean War

due to the still-strict censorship and financial difficulties they faced. Likewise, the colonial police force was demilitarised, but the new civilian police force had greater numbers and spread across more of the nation's settlements, supplementing increased surveillance from the state. Even this slightly more liberal approach was soon abandoned, and in 1930 military rule was reinstated.

In 1936, Minami Jirō was appointed the new Governor-General, a hardline politician heavily in favour of assimilation. It was under his direction that there began a policy of forced labour mobilisation of Korean people. Hundreds of thousands of Koreans were forced to move to Japan and its colonies to either fight in or provide labour for the Japanese war effort, under the forced pretence that 'Korea and Japan are one' ('naisen ittai'). This was used as the Governor-General's wartime slogan to attempt to get Koreans on board with the Japanese cause, and they implemented further destructive policies – such as a blanket ban on the use of the Korean language in schools – to underscore it. The Korean government now estimates that across the entire colonial period, more than 7.5 million people were forcibly mobilised, with around 2 million of those moved outside Korea. One particularly harrowing part of the labour mobilisation policy saw thousands of young Korean women transported to Japanese territory as 'comfort women', in effect, sex slaves to bring 'comfort' to Japanese soldiers.

> "HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF KOREANS WERE FORCED TO MOVE TO JAPAN AND ITS COLONIES TO EITHER FIGHT IN OR PROVIDE LABOUR FOR THE JAPANESE WAR EFFORT"

Thousands of young Korean women were forced to be 'comfort women' during the late colonial period

At the beginning of the colonial regime, Korean people were banned from adopting Japanese-style surnames. However, in 1939, there was a significant policy shift. From 1940, Koreans were 'allowed' to change their names to fit Japanese conventions. This was no concession, but rather a campaign to push Koreans to change to Japanese surnames to further the cause of the assimilation of Koreans into Japanese culture that the government favoured. Although technically changing names was voluntary, in reality not doing so prevented people from having access to basic needs such as wartime rations. It was never made a legal requirement, so the Japanese could claim that every Korean who had done it had done so of their own free will. By August 1940, over 84 per cent of the Korean population had adopted a Japanese surname.

During the final years of Japanese occupation, as the war raged on and resources became scarcer, the colonial authorities turned their attention to priceless historical artefacts in what was both a desperate attempt to find resources and a flagrant disregard for Korean culture and history. Needing metal for military equipment, they seized and melted down any metal they could find, including temple bells, ceremonial vessels, and bronze statues, many of which were centuries old and of unique cultural value.

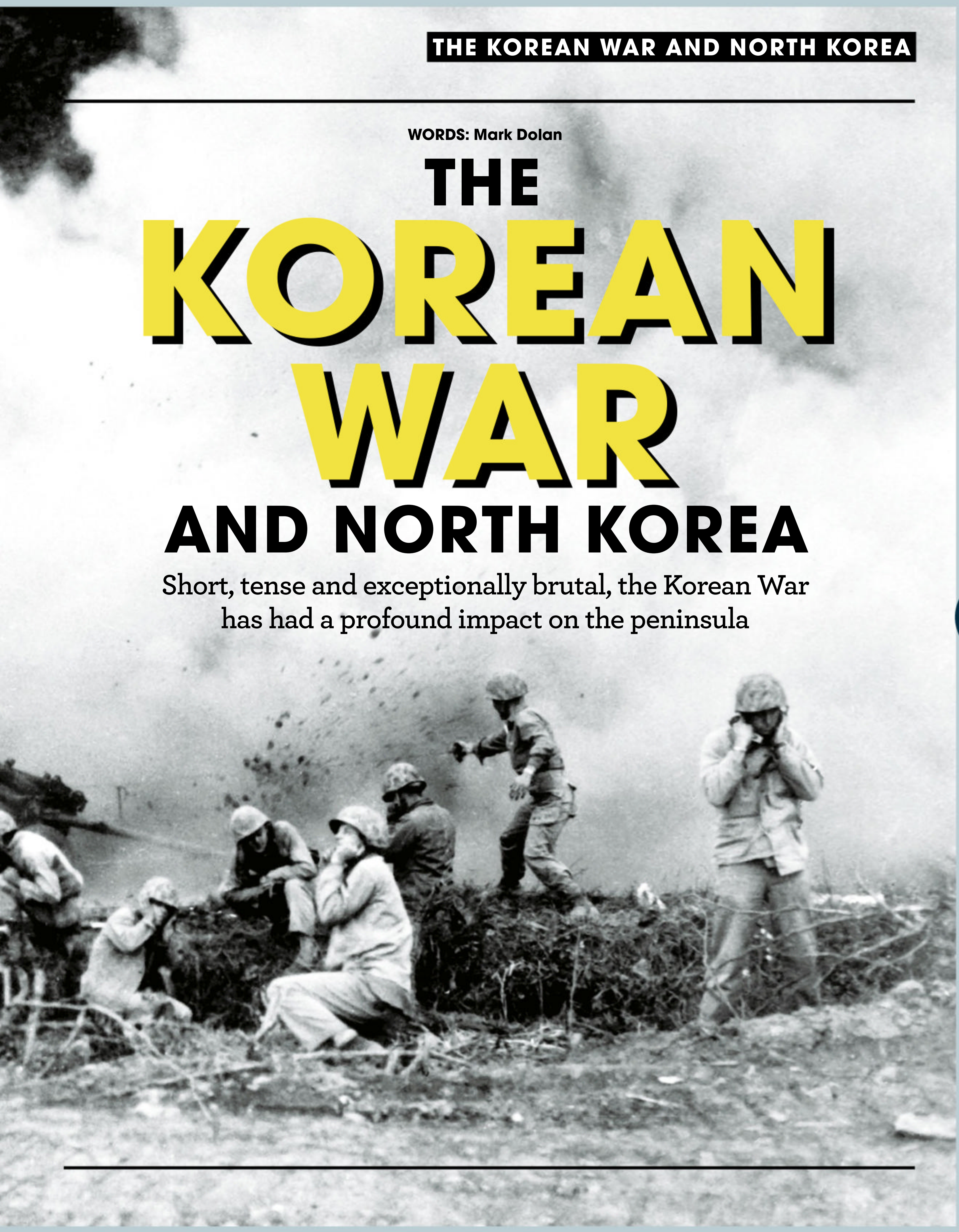
THE END OF COLONISATION

WWII was devastating for Japan and its colonies. It suffered the brutal impact of the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and saw much of its resources wiped out. The impact of the end of the war on the country allowed the USA and USSR to capture the Korean peninsula and bring to an end 35 years of oppressive colonial rule.

The peninsula was subsequently divided into two occupation zones, one – the north – under Soviet control, and the other – the south – under American influence. Though this division was intended to be a temporary state of affairs, the Korean people did not see a unified nation emerge from the ashes, as Cold War tensions led instead to the outbreak of the Korean War.

Image source: Getty Images; Alamy

The events during the course of the Korean War has left a legacy on Koreans to this day



WORDS: Mark Dolan

THE KOREAN WAR AND NORTH KOREA

Short, tense and exceptionally brutal, the Korean War has had a profound impact on the peninsula

US soldiers pass a line of refugees, desperate to flee the escalating fighting and violence

WHAT WAS THE KOREAN WAR?

The Korean War was a short, bloody conflict which owes its existence not to the actions of the Korean people but to the Cold War tensions between the USA and USSR. The temporary division of the Korean Peninsula after the end of the Second World War saw two rival governments founded; a Soviet-backed communist administration in the north, and an American-backed anti-communist regime in the south. Tensions inevitably boiled over, leading to the only on-ground fighting of the Cold War and a devastating three years that have shaped the region to this day.

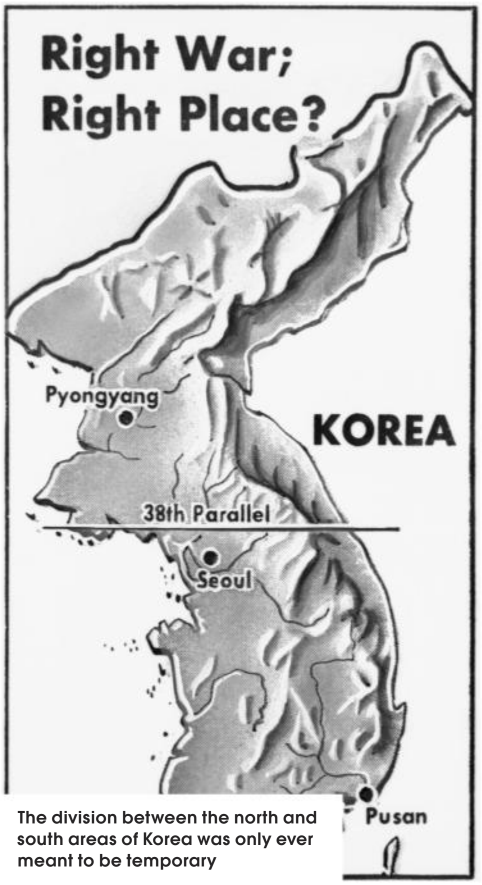
DIVISION AND ESTABLISHMENT OF NORTH AND SOUTH KOREA

When WWII concluded, Japan's colonial rule of Korea was forcibly ended as they surrendered to the Allies. American and Soviet soldiers were dispatched to oversee Japan's exit from the country, with the Americans taking up residence south of the 38th parallel, and the Soviet troops occupying the territory to the north. There was no intention for either side's army to remain in the region for an extended period of time, but US/USSR tensions and concerns over each state's sphere of influence led to the decision to split the peninsula between the two powers. The following three years saw the Soviets develop a communist regime in the north – the Democratic People's Republic of Korea – and the Americans establish a military government in the south: the Republic of Korea.

In 1948, the US called for a UN-backed vote for the entire Korean population to decide the fate of the peninsula, but when the North refused to participate, the American-backed South declared a new government based in Seoul and led by Syngman Rhee. In response, the North declared their own government in Pyongyang led by Kim Il-Sung. Neither side saw their respective regime as limited to their occupied territory, but viewed them as the sole legitimate government. Both Rhee and Kim wanted to unite the peninsula under their command. With these two opposing, ambitious governments in place, conflict was inevitable,

Syngman Rhee was the first president of the American-backed South Korea, based in Seoul

Kim Il-Sung was the first leader of North Korea, having the blessing of the Soviets


Right War;
Right Place?
Pyongyang
KOREA
38th Parallel
Seoul
Pusan

The division between the north and south areas of Korea was only ever meant to be temporary

DAILY HERALD
DAILY EXPRESS
WAR ON 38th PARALLEL
KOREA: U.N. ORDERS 'CEASE FIRE'
UNITED NATIONS ORDER
"STOP THIS INVASION" CALL TO RED KOREA BY SECURITY COUNCIL
U.S. ARMS READY FOR KOREA
INVADERS DRIVEN BACK 25 MILES, SAYS SOUTH
Korea Reds Ignore 'Cease Fire' Order
DAILY GRAPHIC

Just a few years after WWII, newspapers were once again reporting on battles

> **"TRUMAN BELIEVED THAT IF THIS ACT OF AGGRESSION WAS LEFT UNCHECKED, AS HITLER'S INVASIONS HAD BEEN, IT WOULD INEVITABLY LEAD TO A THIRD WORLD WAR"**

yet in 1949 the soldiers from both the USA and the USSR withdrew. Even before the beginning of the Korean War, there were clashes around the 38th parallel, and just under 10,000 Koreans were killed before war was declared.

THE INVASION OF THE SOUTH

On 25 June 1950, the North Korean army made the move that heralded the beginning of the Korean War. Kim's army marched across the 38th parallel to invade and conquer the South, the first step in achieving their aim for a united communist Korea. The coordinated offensive saw around 90,000 North Korean soldiers attack several strategic locations along the border; on foot, by train, and in tanks supplied by the Soviets.

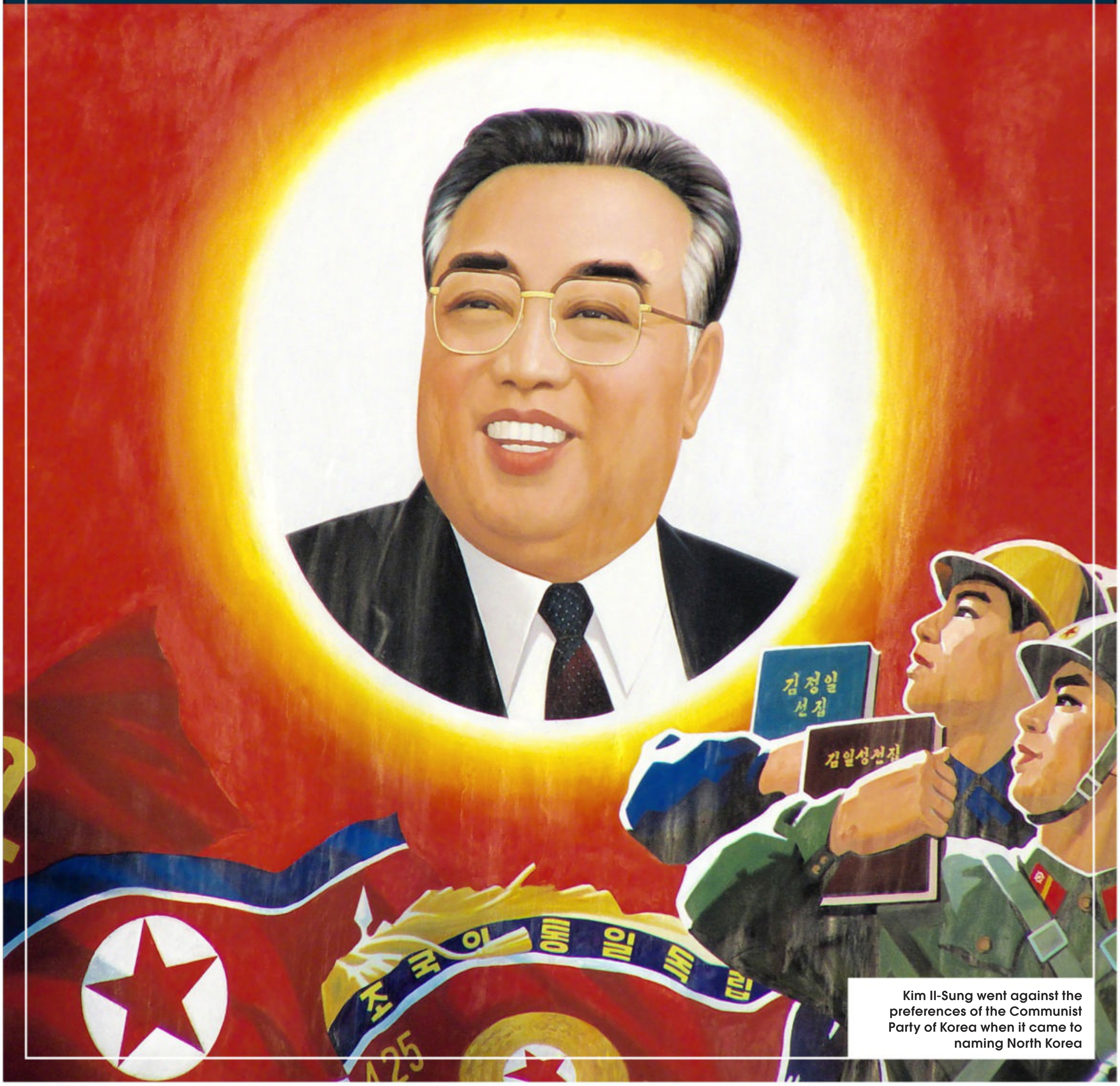
After evacuating its troops, the US had considered the immediate fate of Korea a comparatively minor point in its larger plan for defence in East Asia. Historian Michael J Green has suggested that an ill-considered comment by US Secretary of State Dean Acheson may have been partly to blame for the invasion. In a press conference in January 1950, Acheson had let it slip that America's defence policy excluded Korea. Stalin may have taken this to mean America would be reluctant to enter into a conflict over the fate of Korea. So, when Kim expressed his desire to mobilise his substantial forces and invade the South, following in the footsteps of Mao Zedong in China, Stalin acquiesced.

The implication, certainly as interpreted by President Harry S Truman and the US government, was that this was an indication of the USSR's new foreign policy. This unexpected aggressive move by a regime directly supported by the Soviets was thought to augur further expansionism, echoing, as it did, previous instances of territorial expansion undertaken by Germany, Italy and Japan in the 1930s. Truman believed that if this act of aggression was left unchecked, as Hitler's invasions had been, it would inevitably lead to a third World War.

HOW NORTH KOREA GOT ITS NAME

The name of the secretive state has its own secret history

The official name of North Korea, The Democratic People's Republic of Korea, has often been thought slightly odd, unnecessarily long, and a bit clunky. It came about as a result of the obsession with the communists' obsession with small aspects of Marxist-Leninist terminology. In the 1940s, when the USSR was helping to found what would become the DPRK, there was a debate about whether the new North Korean government should be the 'Democratic Republic' – a moniker previously used when the USSR attempted to conquer Finland in 1939 – or the 'People's Republic'. The leader of the Communist Party of Korea, Pak Hong-yong, wanted to name the new government the 'Korean People's Republic', but Kim Il-Sung favoured the Chinese-inspired 'Democratic People's Republic'. The Soviets backed the latter, and so it became the official name, as it is to this day.



Kim Il-Sung went against the preferences of the Communist Party of Korea when it came to naming North Korea

UN COUNTEROFFENSIVE

It took just three days for Kim's North Korean army to reach and seize Seoul, the capital of the Republic of Korea, forcing Rhee to flee the city. Truman was quick to remobilise troops and send them back into the South to push back against the North. The momentum, however, was firmly on Kim's side, and by the summer of 1950, his army had pushed the South Koreans and Americans as far south as Busan. The US asked the recently formed United Nations to intervene – with an underlying fear that if the UN didn't act, its members would lose trust in the project – and the UN complied, recommending its members lend military support to South Korea. A coalition of 22 countries was formed, including Britain, Canada, France and Australia, headed by US General Douglas MacArthur.

Although the Korean War began as a defensive one, intending to push the North Koreans back past the 38th parallel and out of South Korea, it quickly morphed into an offensive one, with the aim of 'liberating' the North from the communist regime. By August, North Korean progress had been halted near Busan, and neither side was making major advancements. In September, however, MacArthur's UN-backed army carried out an ambitious offensive, aiming to land at the port of Inchon deep in communist-occupied territory. MacArthur led 260 US and British Navy ships in an attack on Inchon on 15 September, and were able to overwhelm the communist forces there and push inland, taking back Seoul nine days later and capturing tens of thousands of North Korean POWs in the process.

Not satisfied with their successes so far, MacArthur's army surged northwards, pushing the North Koreans back across the 38th parallel and continuing to take Pyongyang on 19 October 1950. Although Truman was wary of antagonising China as the UN/US forces advanced towards the Chinese border, MacArthur was unconcerned, confident that the Chinese wouldn't dare take on his army and indeed even favouring all-out war against China. Truman was concerned about MacArthur's intentions and dismissed him from his post in April 1951, replacing him with the less maverick General Matthew Ridgway.

THE ARRIVAL OF CHINA

Unbeknownst to the Americans, Mao had decided early in the conflict that if the North Koreans suffered at the hands of American

> **"MACARTHUR WAS CONFIDENT THAT THE CHINESE WOULDN'T DARE TAKE ON HIS ARMY, EVEN FAVOURING ALL-OUT WAR AGAINST CHINA"**

Truman argued that UN involvement in the Korean War was essential if its members were to trust the project

Matthew Ridgway, who replaced General MacArthur, meeting with South Korean leader Syngman Rhee

MacArthur was pivotal in the Inchon Landing

WELL.COME.US.ARMY
美軍歓迎
담배

The arrival of the US troops was welcomed by the South Koreans

> "THE POPULATION OF SEOUL DROPPED FROM ITS PRE-WAR NUMBER OF 1.5 MILLION TO JUST 200,000 THROUGH A COMBINATION OF VIOLENCE AND STARVATION"

THE WAR BEGAN HERE -
JUNE 25, 1950
38TH PARALLEL
COURTESY
1ST CAVALRY DIVISION

General MacArthur enjoyed early success in the war, before China entered the fray

aggression, he would send Chinese troops in to lend aid, since Koreans had fought on the Chinese side in the Second Sino-Japanese War a few years earlier. Of course, Mao's actions were also defensive, as he saw MacArthur's army marching on China's borders and waging war on a communist ally.

In November, China sent 260,000 soldiers into North Korea to push the UN army back past the 38th parallel. At the same time, temperatures plummeted to their lowest in a century, causing American machinery to break down and leave troops struggling with the conditions. The UN troops retreated to the 38th parallel, but months of hard fighting ensued, with Seoul taken by the Chinese-backed communists in January 1951 and subsequently re-taken by the UN army in March. During this time, conditions for the Korean people were dire, and the population of Seoul dropped from its pre-war number of 1.5 million to just 200,000 through a devastating combination of violence and starvation.

In April 1951, the Chinese mounted another attack, aiming to recapture Seoul again, breaking through the buffer that the UN troops had managed to establish north of the capital. Although the Chinese army had a numerical advantage, they were held up at the Imjin River, primarily by the British 29th Independent Infantry Brigade. For three days, the British soldiers were able to hold out, alongside South Korean, American and other UN troops, with the Battle of the Imjin River becoming the bloodiest engagement Britain had taken part in since the Second World War. The Chinese eventually broke through, but suffering over 10,000 casualties (according to some estimates), their momentum was hugely stalled.

STALEMATE AND ARMISTICE NEGOTIATIONS

The Battle of Imjin River marked the end of the mobile conflict of the Korean War. The Chinese and North Koreans accepted the fact that they did not have the resources to wage all-out war against the UN Coalition, and a stalemate ensued around the 38th parallel, with no further advancements from either side. In June 1951, the Soviets indicated their willingness to seek an agreement via arbitration. Peace talks commenced the following month, but unfortunately there was to be no quick resolution.

In fact, talks dragged on over the next two years, with disagreements over forced 'repatriation' of prisoners of war a key issue. Meanwhile, even though there was no significant territory exchange after this date, there were regular skirmishes along the 38th parallel and occasional planned attacks to try and strengthen negotiating positions.

Finally, on 27 July 1953, an armistice was agreed and signed by Kim (for North Korea), Peng Dehuai (on behalf of China) and Mark W Clark (on behalf of the UN Coalition). Interestingly, though Rhee had agreed to the armistice, neither he nor any other representative of the Republic of Korea ever signed the document.

Almost as soon as this agreement was signed, troops of both sides withdrew to create the four-kilometre wide (2.5-mile) Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) that serves as a buffer between the territories to this day. Although the armistice brought the fighting to an end, because no official peace treaty was ever signed, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea are still technically at war to this day, and the Korean peninsula remains divided.

Today, the Korean War stands as the only 'hot' war of the Cold War era, where the

The Korean War was devastating for civilians, with thousands upon thousands being killed

Despite representatives from North Korea and China, no-one from South Korea signed the armistice

After retreating from the region, the US had to quickly remobilise troops to the area

After two long years of talks, an armistice was finally agreed and signed in July 1953

tensions between the USA and USSR boiled over into fighting on the ground. It was a particularly bloody war, too, lasting just three years but leading to the deaths of around 3 million Koreans, half of whom were civilians: a ratio that's higher than either the Second World War or the Vietnam War. In addition, it's estimated that 1.6 million Chinese died (depending on who the source is) as well as hundreds of thousands of UN Coalition soldiers. In Europe, the war pushed the Western powers to solidify the newly established North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) from a loose association into a bonafide military alliance.

For Koreans, the war understandably had the greatest impact, damaging the psyche of the Korean people in a profound way. Memories of the war have affected a generation of Koreans, with war orphans and divided families some of the casualties. The presence of US military bases, mandatory national service for men and ultimately a volatile, divided peninsula all continue to shape the lives of Koreans to this day.

The Korean War was an important moment for the United Nations

> **“FOR KOREANS, THE WAR UNDERSTANDABLY HAD THE GREATEST IMPACT, DAMAGING THE PSYCHE OF THE KOREAN PEOPLE IN A PROFOUND WAY”**

NORTH KOREA AND THE WAR

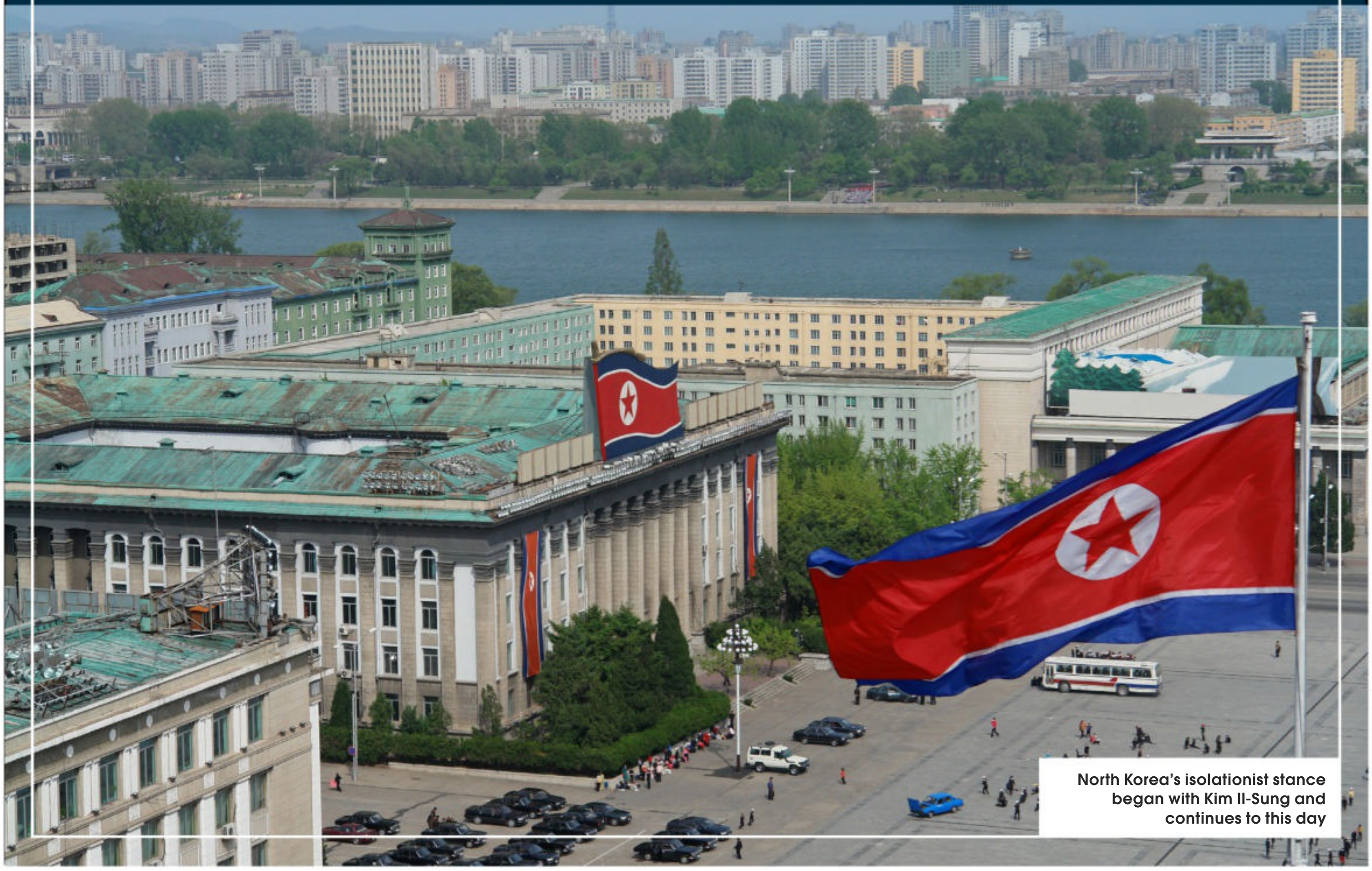
Exploring the DPRK's journey in the decades after the armistice

North Korea, or The Democratic People's Republic of Korea, was shaped by the events of the Korean War. The communist regime that the USSR imposed has been taken to new levels in the decades since the armistice, but the country as it is today owes its existence to Kim Il-Sung, the Soviets' choice of leader. Kim very quickly set about militarising the state, initially aided by foreign support from the USSR and China, but as these countries began to reduce the support they gave, Kim stayed the course, intending to become fully self-reliant. This sole focus on defence investment led to poor investment in other areas, with food shortages becoming common and standards of living dropping.

Two other key aspects of Kim's rule were his efforts to grant himself ever more power (before establishing his dynastic ideology when he appointed his son, Kim Jong-il to three powerful government posts) and cutting North Korea off from the rest of the world. Severe restrictions on travel outside of the country were imposed, as were tight controls on any kind of media; these have remained in place ever since, and have contributed to the nation's famous isolationist policy.

Alongside his efforts to maintain absolute power and put his son in line to succeed him, Kim promoted a cult of personality around himself, referring to himself as the 'Great Leader'. On his death in 1994, he was succeeded as intended by Kim Jong-il, who continued his policies and totalitarian rule. It was around this time that North Korea suffered a catastrophic famine. The majority of good farming land was in South Korea, and so North Korea, with its self-reliant ideology, was reliant on squeezing the most out of its scant arable land with irrigation technology and chemical fertilisers. Still, the large population could not be adequately provided for, and food shortages were a part of daily life. When in the summer of 1995 it rained for ten days straight, the subsequent floods decimated the country's rice crop. The resulting famine is thought to have led to the deaths of between 600,000 and 1,000,000 people, up to five per cent of the total population. UN relief efforts, which included emergency supplies donated by South Korea, Japan and the USA, lessened the effects, but at home, the North Korean government promoted the 'Arduous March' campaign, a push for people to patriotically skip meals.

International relations thawed somewhat in the early 2000s, as the state began to pursue diplomatic relations with various Western nations and a warmer relationship with South Korea. Attempts to repair relations with Japan and the USA, however, were largely unsuccessful. Wider diplomatic relations have been strained by the country's determination to pursue nuclear weaponisation. This latter policy has been heavily promoted by the third generation of the Kim dynasty, Kim Jong-un, who was declared the country's 'Supreme Leader' on the death of his father (also known by the title) in 2011. In recent times, North Korea's continued testing of nuclear weaponry has seen the UN impose various sanctions on the country, while its citizens continue to live under conditions that have persisted since Kim Il-Sung's reign, with limited freedoms and no access to the outside world.



North Korea's isolationist stance began with Kim Il-Sung and continues to this day

Image source: Alamy; Getty Images

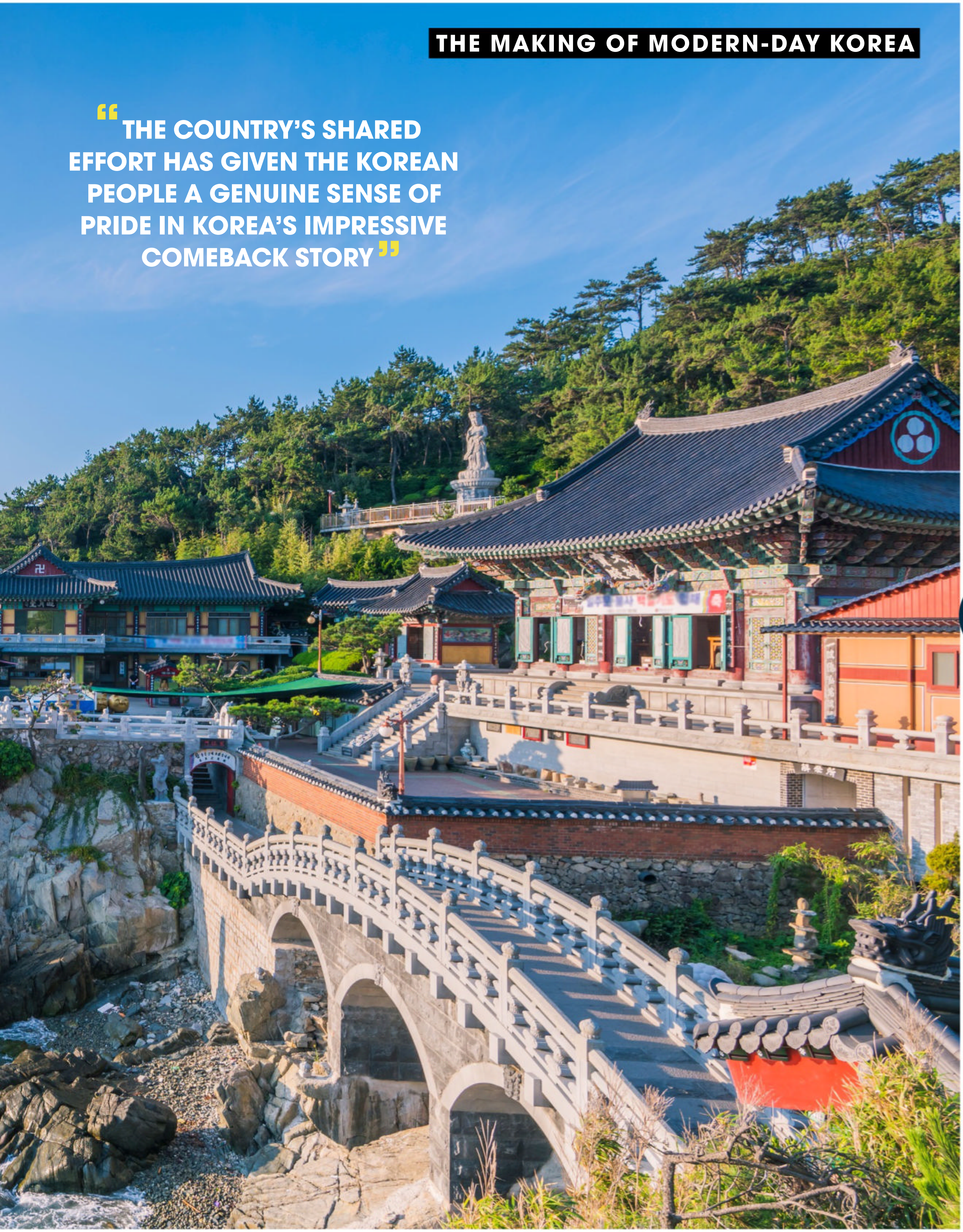
WORDS: Hannah Grafton

THE MAKING OF MODERN-DAY KOREA

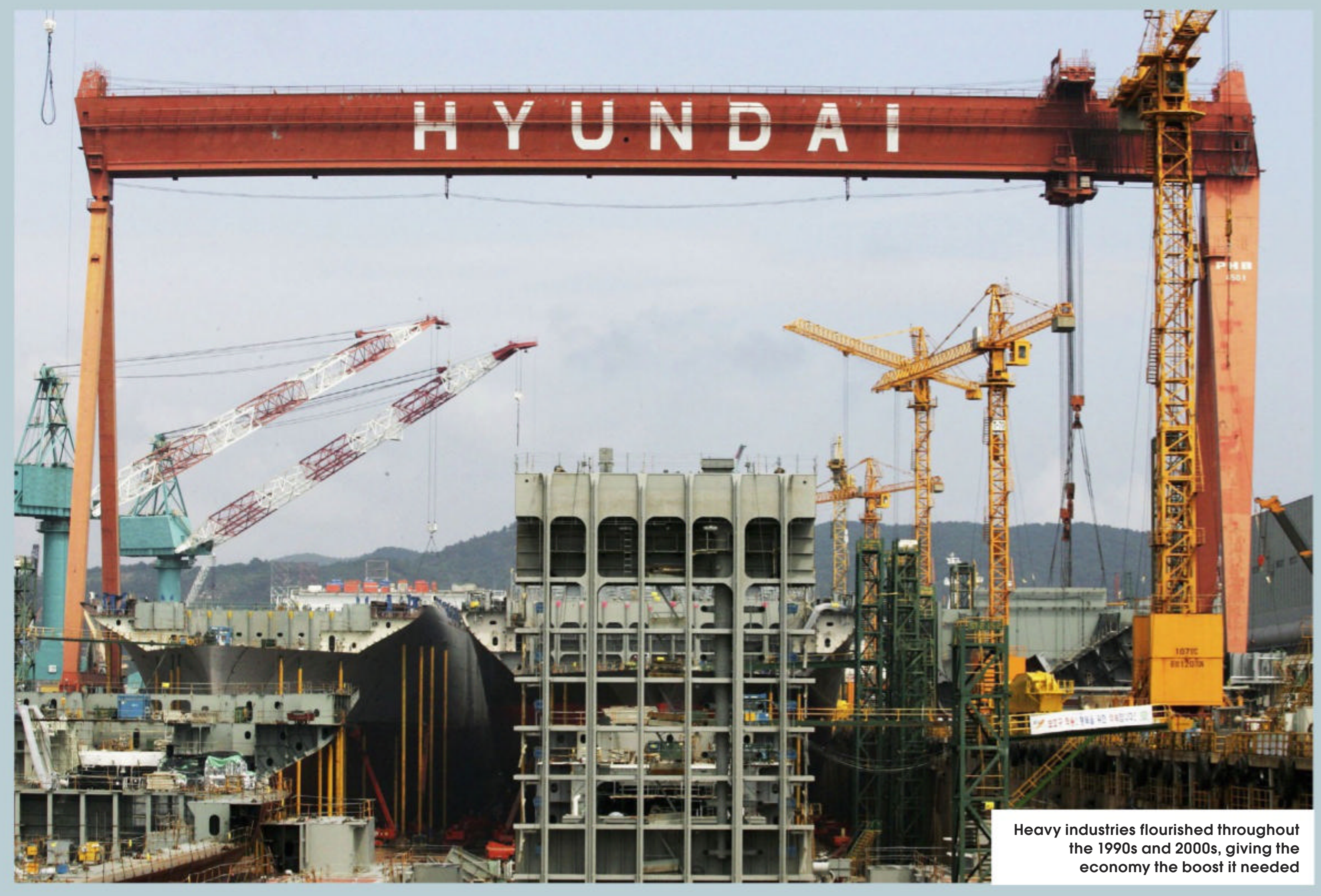
How one of the most powerful countries in East Asia went from post-war failure to flourishing in just four decades

In 1953, South Korea was emerging from a brutal three-year war that had left the country in ruin. The government was unstable, the economy was struggling, and entire cities had been flattened by the conflict. Today, South Korea could not look more different. It's a powerhouse of culture and technology – the fourth largest economy in Asia and the 12th largest economy overall. In 2023, 11 million tourists visited South Korea from overseas, making it the 20th most visited country in the world. Not bad for a region that is roughly the same size as Portugal. This dramatic transformation has been dubbed the 'Miracle on the Hangang River', named after the picturesque channel that flows through Seoul. But despite this label, it was far from a work of divine intervention.

South Korea had developed into a technology and cultural powerhouse over the last few decades



> “THE COUNTRY’S SHARED EFFORT HAS GIVEN THE KOREAN PEOPLE A GENUINE SENSE OF PRIDE IN KOREA’S IMPRESSIVE COMEBACK STORY”



Heavy industries flourished throughout the 1990s and 2000s, giving the economy the boost it needed

POST-WAR PROSPECTS

Coming out of over 30 years of Japanese colonial occupation, where Korean culture, language, and business were heavily stifled, Korea recovered its independence in 1945. But bitter tensions between the north and south of the country soon triggered a violent war, leaving upwards of 2 million dead.

In 1953, after three years of war, the Korean Peninsula was divided along the 38th parallel, where a demilitarised zone (DMZ) was established. The North, allied with China and the Soviet Union, established itself as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), while the South, supported by the United States became the Republic of Korea (ROK).

Much of Korean industry was left flattened after the war and Japan's occupation

The fighting may have been over, but South Korea was in a very vulnerable position. The economy was in tatters, with GDP per capita sitting below $100. To put things into perspective, South Korea's GDP per capita is now over $36,000.

A STRUGGLE FOR POWER

During the 1950s, South Korea was one of the poorest countries in the world. A lot of the region's natural resources – iron, coal, and gold – were located in the newly-established North Korea, along with many factories and industrial facilities.

Throughout this decade, South Korea was governed by President Syngman Rhee, an anti-communist who eliminated all political opposition. Rhee rigged the 1960 election to secure himself a fourth term, sparking outrage among the Korean people and eventually forcing him to step down. Another election was called as parties battled for power, and while the Democratic Party won a landslide victory, the country's problems proved insurmountable for this new government.

Economic decline and the gradual breakdown of politics resulted in a military coup d'état in 1961, led by Major-General Park Chung-hee. Park created a reformist military Supreme Council that seized power over the country, promising to restore order and implement reforms. Two years later, in the first elections since the coup, Park won by a narrow margin, remaining in power until his assassination in 1979.

> "WITH LITTLE TO EXPORT, THE COUNTRY HAD TO GET CREATIVE – DIPPING ITS TOE INTO WIG MANUFACTURING"

Park Chung-hee's regime laid out a number of sweeping economic policies, including the pivotal Five Year Plans, which were designed to quickly industrialise the country and build a strong manufacturing sector. With little available to export, the country had to get creative – including dipping its toe into wig manufacturing. Women started cutting off and selling their locks to the growing industry, and before long, wigs became the third-largest export

Park Chung-hee, the military general who seized power in the coup of 1961

after clothes and plywood. In the 1970s, one-third of the wigs worn in North America were made in Korea!

EDUCATING THE MASSES

Beyond building up its light export industries, Korea under Park Chung-hee funnelled investment into chemical facilities and heavier industrial products, quickly developing manufacturing infrastructure for semiconductors, steel, cars, and mobile phones. Today, South Korea has grown to be a global leader in these industries.

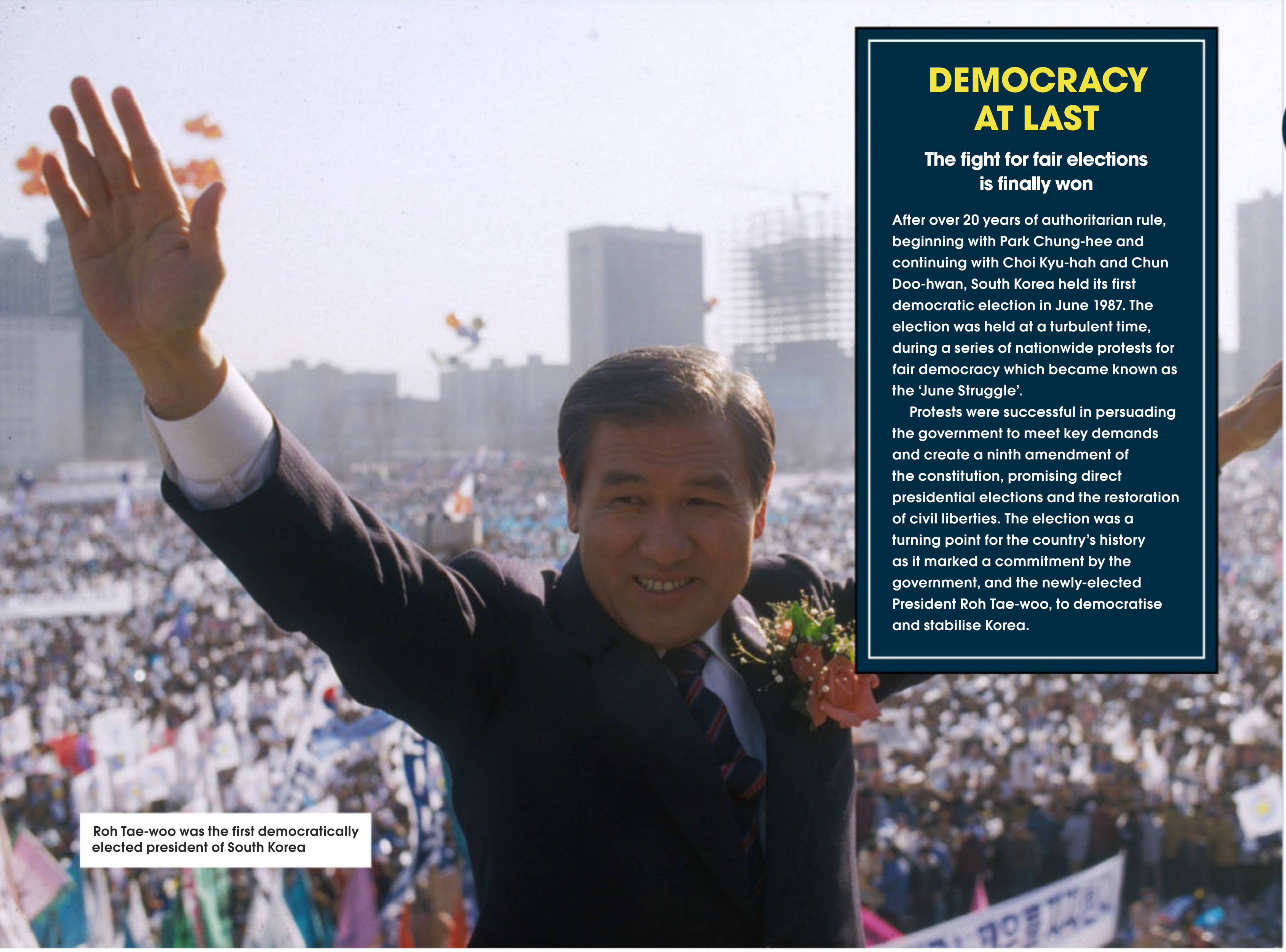
The country also invested heavily in education. Labourers were encouraged to not only work 10-12 hour days, but also to attend night school afterwards to learn to read and write. And it worked – in the 1950s, only 22 per cent of Koreans were literate, but by the 1970s, this had shot up to over 87 per cent. The government also poured funds into secondary and university education, meaning Korea started its industrial revolution with a better-educated population than most nations.

But it wasn't just learning to read and write that helped Koreans excel, it was specialist technical training as well. Much of it provided by the United States, this training created a country full of talented statisticians, economists, and engineers.

KEEPING IT IN THE FAMILY

Education and investment into the country's infrastructure resulted in a larger pool of educated entrepreneurs looking to start their own successful businesses. This saw the rise of the 'chaebols', huge industrial conglomerates that still dominate the Korean economy today.

These companies, many of them founded in the 1950s, are still managed largely by their founding families, producing components for various export products and creating a huge number of jobs for Korean workers. The chaebols include some of the biggest businesses in global technology and manufacturing – Samsung, Hyundai, Daewoo, and LG, to name just a few. No matter what people think of their


Roh Tae-woo was the first democratically elected president of South Korea

DEMOCRACY AT LAST

The fight for fair elections is finally won

After over 20 years of authoritarian rule, beginning with Park Chung-hee and continuing with Choi Kyu-hah and Chun Doo-hwan, South Korea held its first democratic election in June 1987. The election was held at a turbulent time, during a series of nationwide protests for fair democracy which became known as the 'June Struggle'.

Protests were successful in persuading the government to meet key demands and create a ninth amendment of the constitution, promising direct presidential elections and the restoration of civil liberties. The election was a turning point for the country's history as it marked a commitment by the government, and the newly-elected President Roh Tae-woo, to democratise and stabilise Korea.

old-fashioned, centralised structures, it's undeniable that their success has gone on to influence the success of the Korean economy at large.

A COUNTRY IN CRISIS

In 1997, after 40 years of impressive progress, South Korea was hit by one of the biggest economic threats to date: the Asian financial crisis. Starting in Thailand and quickly spreading across the continent, the crisis caused foreign investors to pull out of Korea at rapid speed.

The Korean government took out a loan of $58 billion from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to deal with the fallout, although only ended up using just over $19 billion, which was paid back three years before the loan's deadline. Every effort was taken to pay back the IMF promptly, even if it meant citizens making personal sacrifices. People lined up to give the government gold, including wedding rings, precious jewellery, and other family treasures, so that the country could pay back its loan to the IMF. Korea's culture is rooted in Confucian values of collectivism, education, and respect – so much so that citizens were willing to give up their own possessions to secure their country's future. This shared effort has given the Korean people a genuine sense of pride in Korea's impressive comeback story.

BACK ON THE GLOBAL STAGE

Despite the fact that South Korea paid their IMF debt back in record time, the Asian financial crisis, as well as lingering memories of the Korean War, left the country with a serious image problem in the 1990s. Although the country established a stable democratic system in the 1980s, the previous decades of political turbulence, repression, and widespread protests meant the country faced overall global scepticism.

South Korea needed the world to see just how far it had come. How? By increasing its cultural exports. The government realised just how impactful 'soft power' (the subtle power a country wields through its image, rather than through force) could be, so made it their goal to become one of the world's leading exporters of popular culture.

A Samsung production line – rapid industrialisation saw the rise of the chaebols

> "KOREAN POPULAR CULTURE HAS EXPLODED, FIRST ACROSS ASIA AND EVENTUALLY TO THE WESTERN WORLD"

WORLD SPORT HITS SEOUL

How the 1988 Olympics changed Korea forever

Just one year after the country's first democratic election was held, South Korea hosted the 1988 Summer Olympic Games in Seoul. Still trying to shake the negative associations of the war, the games helped Korea transform its international image.

As well as giving Koreans a greater sense of national pride, the games saw Seoul receive some much-needed infrastructure investment. From the brand-new Olympic Park to green spaces along the Hangang River and improved public transport, the city was transformed, with facilities that remain as some of Seoul's biggest tourist attractions today.

The games were the first major sporting event that was held in South Korea, encouraging confidence, spirit, and pride among the Korean people. Seoul 1988 is regarded as one of the most successful Olympic Games in history, and to this day, you can still see the event's adorable tiger mascot, Hodori, dotted around public spaces in Seoul!

The opening ceremony of the 1988 Summer Olympic Games in Seoul

Today tourists are flocking to Korea to explore the culture for themselves

HALLYU HITS THE WORLD

Hallyu is a Chinese term, meaning ‘Korean Wave’ – although ‘tsunami’ might be a more fitting term in this case! Since the turn of the millennium, Korean popular culture has exploded, first across Asia and eventually to the Western world. And the impact of Hallyu goes beyond international recognition, it has brought with it major financial success, too. Estimates have stated that Korean content exports reached an all-time high of 18.38 trillion Korean won ($13.2 billion) in 2022.

The dawn of the Korean wave has been attributed to a handful of things, namely the 1999 crime film, *Shiri*; the 2000 K-drama, *Autumn in My Heart*; and K-pop artists BoA, Rain, BIGBANG, and Girls’ Generation. Since the 2010s and the rise of social media, Korean culture has become even more prolific in the West, with K-pop getting a boost from the explosive popularity of PSY’s ‘Gangnam Style’ and the rise of BTS and BLACKPINK. The 2019 film *Parasite* became the first non-English language film to win the Academy Award for Best Picture, and popular K-dramas like *Squid Game* have introduced Korean culture to the world, helping producers secure investment to constantly create new, fresh entertainment.

Beyond the screen, Korean cosmetics brands like LANEIGE, Sulwhasoo, and Dr.Jart+ have gained global popularity. And the Hallyu effect has even had an impact on eating habits, with sales of Korean beverages and foods like instant ramen surging in recent years.

Girls’ Generation are credited as superstars of the Hallyu era, attracting fans from around the world

A STORY OF SUCCESS

Hallyu has given Korea an opportunity to showcase its rich culture, people, and scenery to the world. As a result, tourists have been flocking to the country to experience it for themselves. According to the US News & World Report, South Korea’s cultural influence has risen by 24 spots in the past seven years to seventh in 2025, just below the UK and Japan.

With the Hallyu wave proving itself to be more than a fleeting trend, and Korean technology and manufacturing industries establishing themselves as purveyors of quality and innovation, the country’s reputation is clear. From tragic grief to immense growth in less than half a century, South Korea’s story has been one of hard-earned success.

Image source: Alamy; Getty Images

48

56

66

60

44

CULTURE & CUSTOMS

44 A Crash Course in the Korean Language
48 A Taste of South Korea
52 Recipe: Kimchi
53 Recipe: Bugae-Jjigae
54 Recipe: Bibimbap
56 Hanbok: Traditional Korean Clothing
60 Exploring Korean Art
66 A Guide to South Korean Etiquette

WORDS: Hannah Grafton

A CRASH COURSE IN THE KOREAN LANGUAGE

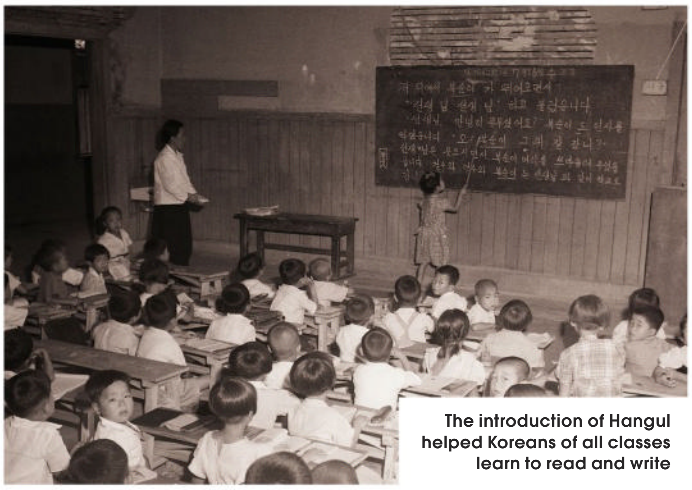
Find out why, despite its mysterious origin and giant vocabulary, Korean is now the second-fastest growing language in the world

King Sejong the Great introduced Hangul, which is thought to explain Korea's high literacy rate

Knowing the right honorific language is very important when socialising in Korea

TOTALA RESTAURANT
찌게집
김밥
명동교자
THEFACESHOP
banila co.

Reading in syllabic blocks takes some practice, but will help you understand Korean words and signs



The introduction of Hangul helped Koreans of all classes learn to read and write

The native language of roughly 80 million people, Korean, known as Kugo in the language itself, has a mysterious origin, and a writing system designed by royalty – Sejong the Great, the fourth king of the Joseon Dynasty, to be exact. Despite having fewer characters than the English alphabet, the number of words in the Korean dictionary is vast. The most words listed in a dictionary for any language, in fact, and we can thank the many duplicate words in traditional Chinese, Japanese, English, and the complicated Korean honorific system for this. But why is the language so complex, and what are some of the words and phrases you need to know when travelling in Korea?

THE SPOKEN AND WRITTEN WORD

Spoken Korean is thought to have descended from the regions to the north of modern-day South Korea – North Korea, China and Russia – and from areas to the south, including Japan. Korean has also been linked to other languages including Turkish, Mongolian, Hungarian and Finnish. Despite fairly mysterious origins, we know that it has been spoken since 57 BCE in its initial version, Old Korean, and has continued to evolve ever since.

The Korean writing system, however, is far more recent. Chinese characters were used predominantly as the medium of formal writing in Korea from the first century all the way until the 19th century. Korean scholars adapted these characters, which were known in Korean as Hanja, to create their own language, combining Chinese graphs to signify word meanings and sounds. But this system could only be used by those educated in classical Chinese, at a time when most of the Korean population couldn't read or write.

HANGUL IS BORN

In 1446, King Sejong the Great personally created a new alphabet system, known today as Hangul, to increase literacy in Korea. While 1446 might sound like a long time ago, the Chinese writing system is thought to have been fully developed by the 14th century BCE, meaning Chinese literature was being written almost 2,000 years before the Korean alphabet was even designed!

Hangul combines the ancient Korean word, 'han', meaning 'great', and 'gul', meaning 'script'. The basic consonants of Hangul were carefully designed to mimic the shape of the mouth that each sound requires, and the vowels were created based on the shapes representing heaven (a dot), earth (a horizontal line), and human (a vertical line). This made the script easy to learn and efficient to write, with King Sejong producing a detailed handbook introducing Hangul and explaining its use. The invention of Hangul is a major achievement in the history of Korean culture, as historians attribute Korea's high literacy rate to its simplicity.

> **"THE INVENTION OF HANGUL IS A MAJOR ACHIEVEMENT IN THE HISTORY OF KOREAN CULTURE, AS HISTORIANS ATTRIBUTE KOREA'S HIGH LITERACY RATE TO ITS SIMPLICITY"**

With just 24 basic letters – 14 consonants and 10 vowels – Hangul is surprisingly easy to learn. In fact, within a couple of hours you'll find you can memorise the basic letters and sound out some Korean words!

LANGUAGE INFLUENCES

Despite Hangul being developed to eliminate the need to learn complicated Chinese characters, Chinese is heavily reflected in the

LEARN HANGUL

Memorise these 24 basic sounds and you'll be able to sound out Korean words!

CONSONANTS

ㄱ	ㄴ	ㄷ	ㄹ	ㅁ
G/K	N	D/T	R/L	M
ㅂ	ㅅ	ㅇ	ㅈ	ㅋ
B/P	S	NG	J	K
ㅌ	ㅍ	ㅊ	ㅎ	
T	P	CH	H	

VOWELS

ㅏ	ㅑ	ㅓ	ㅕ	ㅗ
A	YA	EO	YEO	O
ㅛ	ㅜ	ㅠ	ㅡ	ㅣ
YO	U	YU	EU	I

FOR SOME HANDY WORDS AND PHRASES TO USE WHEN TRAVELLING IN KOREA, CHECK OUT **PAGE 69!**

EXAMPLES

(A AS IN 'CAT')
(YA AS IN 'YARN')
(EO AS IN 'CUP')
(YEO AS IN 'YEARN')
(O AS IN 'OLIVE')
(YO AS IN 'YOGHURT')
(U AS IN 'CLUE')
(YU AS IN 'YOU')

(EU AS IN 'WOOD')
(I AS IN 'KIT')
(G/K AS IN 'GOOD')
(N AS IN 'NICE')
(D/T AS IN 'DOOR')
(R/L AS IN 'GIRL')
(M AS IN 'MOUSE')
(B/P AS IN 'BAD")

(S AS IN 'STILL')
(NG AS IN 'STRONG') (J AS IN "JOKE")
(CH AS IN "CHEW")
(K AS IN "KITE")
(T AS IN "TRICK")
(P AS IN "PRIZE"
(H AS IN "HOLD")

Korean language. Around half the Korean vocabulary is words derived from Chinese, despite being very different in sound and sentence structure.

As time went on, Koreans began to borrow words from the English language too, whether that's straightforward loan words (in Korean, 'shopping', 'chocolate', and 'coffee' are now pronounced just like their English words) or 'Konglish', where English words are shortened, mixed, or the meaning is changed to create new words. Examples of this includes 'hwaiting' (a phrase of encouragement, derived from the English word 'fighting') and 'selka' (meaning 'selfie', a combination of English words 'self' and 'camera').

Unlike in English, which is linear, Korean is written in syllabic blocks, with letters arranged in two dimensions. For example, Seoul is written as 서울, not ㅅㅓㅇㅜㄹ. The syllables begin with a consonant, then a vowel, and sometimes another consonant will follow underneath (this is called 'batchim'). The ㅇ consonant acts as either an ng sound if it's at the end of the syllabic block, or as a silent placeholder if it's written at the start of the block, before a vowel. Just like in Chinese and Japanese writing, Korean texts were traditionally written from top to bottom, right to left. But today, Korean – just like English – is typically written from left to right with spaces in between the words.

DIFFERING DIALECTS

Thanks to a surge of investment into education after the Korean War, Korea has one of the highest literacy rates in the world, which has predictably served as a huge contributor to its speedy economic expansion. Children learn to read and write as early as three years old, and often begin learning a second language – usually English – before they've even begun primary school.

While the whole Korean Peninsula – that's South Korea and North Korea – speaks the same language, there are many variations and dialects. The Pyongyang dialect in North Korea is noticeably separate, with many words differing between the two countries. Within South Korea, there are clear dialects in regions like Gyeongsang, Chungcheong, Jeolla, and Jeju Island, with speech differing in speed, tone, rhythm, and some accents adding additional sounds to words. The Jeju Island dialect is sometimes even considered a separate language altogether, with its own vocabulary and grammatical structures.

INTRODUCING HONORIFICS

Something that makes learning Korean a little more tricky is the use of honorifics. Honorific words or phrases are used to show respect to those you are speaking to, specifically those who are older than you or higher in the social hierarchy – think your boss, teacher, or friend's parents. It's important to note here that Korean culture and language is very hierarchical, with age and status playing a big part in daily communication. Because of this, Koreans always ask each other's ages when meeting for the first time, so when socialising with Koreans, your answer to this question will determine where you fit in the hierarchy.

Thanks to Hallyu, people from around the world are taking the plunge and learning Korean

Using honorifics incorrectly, or not using them at all, can be very taboo among native speakers. Thankfully, if you're a tourist and Korean is not your first language, locals are very understanding and don't expect you to use honorifics flawlessly, if at all. Still, as they are so unique to Korean culture, it's useful to know some of the most-used honorific terms and their meanings.

씨 (shi) – Used after someone's name to address them, similarly to Mr/Mrs/Miss
님 (nim) – A higher honorific than 씨, similar to Sir or Madam in English
오빠 (oppa) – Used by women to address older men
언니 (unnie) – Used by women to address older women
형 (hyung) – Used by men as a way to address older men
누나 (noona) – Used by men as a way to address older women
선배 (sunbae) – Used to address someone who is senior in age or experience
후배 (hubae) – Used to address someone who is junior in age or standing

On top of these pronouns, there are even honorific nouns used as part of the Korean language. For example, to show respect to someone more senior than you, you'd use 댁 (daek) instead of 집 (jib) to say 'house' and 생신 (saengsin) instead of 생일 (saengil) for 'birthday'. As if learning a new language wasn't hard enough!

THE HALLYU EFFECT

With its different syllabic structure and alphabet, Korean is, unfortunately, difficult to master for English speakers. In fact, it's ranked as the top difficulty level for English speakers by the United States. But that has done nothing to deter a new generation of Korean language-learners, spurred on by the recent cultural explosion of Hallyu.

King Sejong produced a handbook that introduced Hangul in the 15th century

When the Korean wave peaked in the 2000s and 2010s, many fans in the Western world were suddenly exposed to the Korean language through K-drama characters and K-pop lyrics. Keen to dive into the culture seen on screen and to be able to communicate with their idols, English speakers are expressing a growing interest in learning Korean. In a 2020 report, language-learning app Duolingo even named Korean as the second-fastest growing language in the world after Hindi.

From Hangul's role in boosting literacy in Korea to the recent rise in interest from foreigners wanting to explore the country's culture, the story of the Korean language is certainly a fascinating one. Despite having just a fifth as many native speakers as those that speak English as a first language, the Korean language is drawing interest from people around the world. And for those just starting their Korean language journey – hwaiting!

Image source: Alamy; Getty Images

WORDS: Hannah Grafton

A TASTE OF SOUTH KOREA

Take a walk through the mouth-watering world of Korean food, known as 'hansik'

The beauty of banchan is in sharing with others, as well as creating a delicious and varied meal

The world has fallen in love with South Korean cuisine, and not just because of its delicious flavours. While the careful blend of spicy, sweet, and sour is a major selling point, the Korean dinner table also draws in food lovers with its countless dishes, banquet-style serving, and colourful ingredients – at a Korean dinner table, it's all about the experience.

A BRIEF FOODIE HISTORY

While Korean cuisine is steeped in tradition, it has continually evolved through the generations. We know that Koreans have been practicing fermentation techniques for thousands of years, with kimchi – one of the most important parts of Korean cuisine – first being mentioned in the 7th century. But more on that later. Fast-forward to the Goryeo Dynasty (10th-14th century) and a culinary trend emerged in the form of barbecue, a major culinary export of Korea today. The influence of Buddhism in Korea also encouraged the use of seasonal vegetables and grains, which resulted in dishes like bibimbap.

During the Joseon Dynasty, which spanned from the late 14th century all the way to the 19th century, crops from around the world began to land in Korea. This included ingredients like maize, potatoes, chilli peppers, nuts, and tomatoes. Meals in the Joseon period were heavily influenced by the Confucian philosophies of balance and harmony, meaning they were carefully structured around rice (bap), soup (guk), and multiple side dishes (banchan). To this day, this is the basic structure of many Korean dishes.

Japan occupied Korea between 1910 and 1945, taking over much of the country's agriculture to grow crops for their own food supply. The working class suffered as a result, and most were likely to eat just a single bowl of white rice a year, saved for special occasions. For the remainder of the year, people used much cheaper grains, such as millet and barley. For the upper classes in Korea at this time, the use of Western foods like dried noodles and bread surged. During the occupation, many Japanese dishes and ingredients made their way across to Korea too, popularising dishes like tempura and sushi.

During the Korean War (1950-53), Koreans continued to struggle with limited food provisions, and most citizens subsisted mostly on rice and vegetables. Koreans had to get creative to feed their families, and America's presence in the country resulted in some interesting culinary concoctions. With access to meat and other proteins limited, Koreans tried adding surplus American army rations like Spam, canned hot dogs, and processed cheese to their stews, which resulted in the budae jjigae dish, otherwise known as Army Base Stew. Despite meat being readily available in Korea today, the dish – Spam included – remains one of the nation's favourites.

After the war, food shortages slowly lessened as the economy grew. Busy working, studying, and helping their country bounce back, Koreans started to consume more instant, processed foods, including the now-beloved instant ramen, which quickly became a staple of the Korean diet. The 1970s also saw a boost in livestock and dairy production, allowing citizens of all classes to enjoy meat regularly. From the 1980s onwards, as the country opened up to the world, Korean cuisine welcomed more Western influences, including pasta, pizza, fried chicken, and American fast food chains.

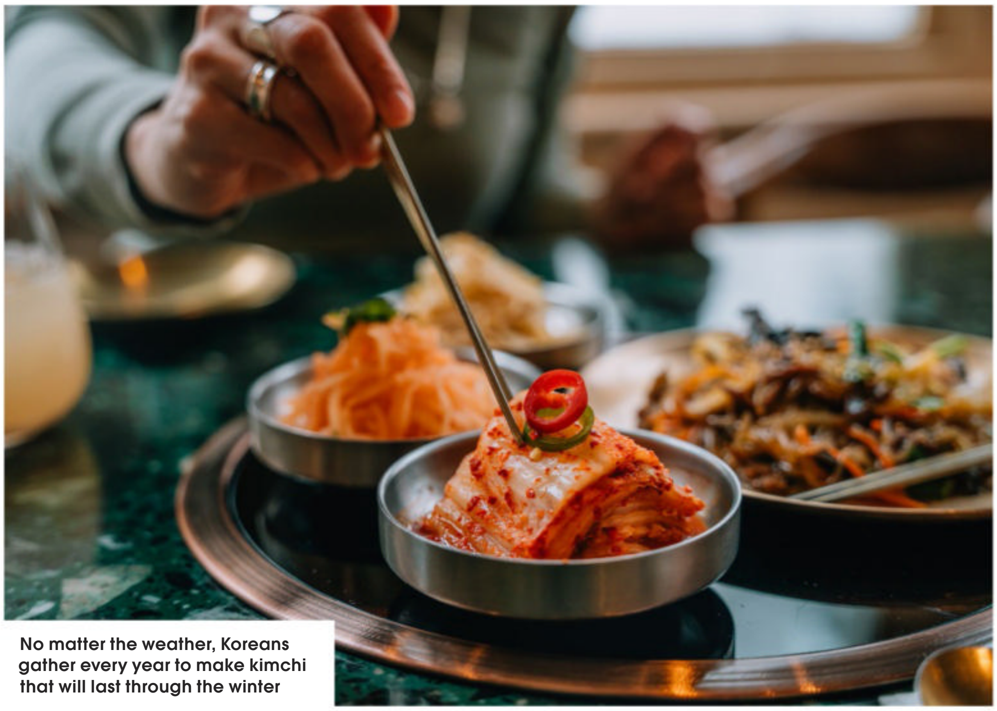
> **"THE AVERAGE KOREAN CAN CONSUME UP TO 50G OF KIMCHI PER DAY, AND THE GOVERNMENT EVEN SPENT TEN YEARS TRYING TO PERFECT FREEZE-DRIED KIMCHI FOR THE KOREAN ASTRONAUTS"**

Gochujang is a backbone of Korean cuisine, used to flavour fermenting vegetables or as a dip

A LOOK IN THE KOREAN KITCHEN

Some of the most commonly-used ingredients in Korea are sesame oil, garlic, ginger, gochugaru (pepper flakes) and cabbage. Then there are the three all-important fermented sauces: gochujang (red chilli paste), doenjang (soybean paste), and ganjang (soy sauce). These three ingredients form the foundation of most Korean dishes, and gochujang and doenjang are also used as dipping sauce for vegetables and barbecued meats. With its colour ranging from tomato red to deep burgundy, depending on its fermentation, gochujang is the key component of kimchi, tteokbokki (spicy rice cakes), bulgogi, bibimbap, and much more.

Cooking mostly with pork and beef, Koreans use all parts of the animal, with jokbal (braised pig's trotters) and seolleongtang (ox bone soup) being some of the country's favourite delicacies. Surrounded predominantly by the ocean, Korea also enjoys a lot of shrimp, abalone, octopus, and squid. Plus, the mountainous, rainy landscape of the Korean countryside makes it the perfect climate for many crops. Rice is the most important of these, with


No matter the weather, Koreans gather every year to make kimchi that will last through the winter

DRINK UP

Take your Korean dining experience to the next level with the right refreshments

No Korean dinner is complete without drinks, and pairing dishes with alcohol is a staple in Korean culture. Most Koreans enjoy their meals with soju, a clear spirit traditionally made from grains like rice and tasting vaguely like vodka, but sweeter. Another favourite is makgeolli, a fermented rice wine known for its milky colour and slightly sour, yoghurt-like taste. Available in a range of flavours, makgeolli is enjoyed mostly with barbeque meats or fried food.

And before you take your first sip, make sure you've brushed up on Korean drinking etiquette. If receiving a glass from someone older than you, you should hold the glass with both hands, bow your head, and turn slightly away when it's time to drink. It can be considered taboo to pour yourself a drink, so when your glass is empty, pass it back to the person who poured it for you, let them refill your glass, and then pour theirs for them.

SOME MUST-TRY DISHES

Take your first steps in the world of Korean cuisine with these...

TTEOKGUK

Consisting of rice cakes, egg and dumplings in a meat-based broth, tteokguk is eaten on the first day of the Lunar New Year to symbolise ageing.

GIMBAP

A regular in children's lunchboxes, gimbap is made by wrapping vegetables, egg, meat and rice in a layer of seaweed.

JAPCHAE

Chewy glass noodles sautéed with mushrooms, carrots, spinach, and onion in a rich umami soy sauce.

BIBIMBAP

A simple dish of warm rice topped with crunchy vegetables, meat, a fried egg, and gochujang.

KIMCHI JJIGAE

A hearty, sour kimchi stew, often with meat or tuna, served piping hot with white rice.

BULGOGI

Thin strips of meat (usually beef) marinated in a sweet and smoky sauce.

JAJANGMYEON

Noodles in a glossy black bean sauce, this Chinese fusion dish is eaten when moving or graduating as it symbolises good luck.

Street food markets are a must when visiting Korea – never limit yourself to just one dish!

> **“STREET FOOD IS A HUGE PART OF KOREAN CULTURE, SERVING SEASONAL FOOD TO BOTH PASSING TOURISTS AND LOYAL LOCALS”**

South Korea producing over 3.5 million tonnes of rice in 2024 alone. Fruits like tangerines, pears, persimmons and strawberries are also abundant, and the country’s ginseng is known around the world for its quality. Keep your eyes peeled at any Korean airport terminal and you’ll see countless ginseng products marketed to transiting tourists!

THE CABBAGE-BASED CULTURAL INSTITUTION

Every autumn, families and neighbours gather across Korea for kimjang, the process of fermenting vegetables to last through the cold months of winter. The outcome of this is, of course, kimchi, which has been a mainstay of Korean cuisine and culture for centuries. After the kimjang process, the kimchi is stored in earthenware pots to maintain the perfect temperature for fermentation. Even in busy city apartments, it isn’t unusual to see kimchi stored on cramped balconies, or kept in entirely separate kimchi fridges. Eaten alongside almost every meal, the average Korean can consume over 50g of kimchi per day, and the government even spent ten years trying to perfect freeze-dried kimchi for the Korean astronauts!

While you’re likely familiar with the traditional napa cabbage kimchi, there are over 200 varieties, using vegetables like onion, cucumber and radish, all preserved in a mixture of red chilli pepper, garlic, ginger, and spring onion. A rich source of vitamins, minerals, and good bacteria, kimchi is used to make jjigae (stew), fried rice, dumplings, and savoury pancakes, and when it’s not the star of the show, it’s always offered as banchan (side dishes). Banchan are usually served in the middle of the table as part of the communal Korean dining experience, and also include marinated vegetables, tofu, seafood, eggs, and nuts. They’re always free of charge and come with unlimited refills, so don’t be shy when asking for a top up.

HITTING THE STREETS

In Korea, you don’t need to go inside a restaurant to try delicious local food. Street food is a huge part of Korean culture, serving seasonal comfort food to both passing tourists and loyal locals. In the city you can find cheap eats being served out of pojangmacha, which act as street carts during the day and tented bars at night.

In Seoul alone, markets in areas like Myeongdong, Insadong, and Dongdaemun serve savoury snacks like the aforementioned tteokbokki, sundae (a sausage similar to black pudding but stuffed with noodles, vegetables, and meat), and odeng (fish cakes in a warming broth). And if you’re looking for something sweet, you’ll find street vendors selling hotteok (pancakes filled with nuts and brown sugar) and bungeoppang (a fish-shaped pastry filled with red bean paste or custard).

FLAVOUR OF THE MOMENT

Today, people around the world are consuming more Korean music, dramas, and films than ever before, exposing them to Korean cuisine and building global demand for Korean eateries and ingredients. Plus, with social media buzz resulting in some dishes going viral, like Buldak fire noodles and dalgona candy, which appeared in an episode of *Squid Game*, Korean dishes are getting more love than ever before. And for those lucky enough to try the real thing, it’s love at first bite.

Dalgona candy became a social media viral sensation thanks to an episode of *Squid Game*

Image source: Getty Images

PREP TIME: 60 minutes **FERMENT TIME:** Up to 1 week

KIMCHI

A treasured national dish, Korea, c.1st century BCE – present

It is believed that kimchi originated during the Three Kingdoms period (57 BCE – 668) when picking vegetables helped to preserve food for longer. The earliest kimchis consisted of radishes fermented in brine, although this changed as new vegetables such as cucumbers were brought to Korea during the Goryeo period (918-1392). Gochugaru, a staple ingredient of modern spicy kimchi, was not introduced to Korea until the 17th century and traditional tongbaechu kimchi, made with napa cabbage, was not invented until the 19th century. Full of healthy bacteria, probiotics, vitamins and minerals, kimchi is a mainstay of Korean culinary culture and heritage. There are hundreds of types of kimchi with regional and seasonal variations, but the following recipe is for simple cabbage kimchi.

INGREDIENTS

- 900g napa cabbage
- 250g daikon radish (or carrots, or both if you prefer)
- 4-6 whole cloves of garlic
- 1 small white onion (optional)
- 1 bunch spring onions
- 1 tbsp fresh ginger
- 3-4 tbsp sea salt
- 2-6 tbsp gochugaru (Korean red pepper flakes)
- 2 tbsp fish sauce (if you want to make your kimchi vegan, use miso paste, soy sauce or vegan fish sauce)
- An air-tight sealed plastic container or glass mason jar

METHOD

01 Start by preparing your vegetables. Remove the core from the napa cabbages and chop into roughly 2.5cm pieces. Finely chop the white onion, peel the ginger and garlic, cut your radish or carrot into thin matchstick pieces and diagonally slice the spring onions.

02 Soak the pieces of cabbage in cold water before placing the soaked cabbage in a large bowl. Sprinkle the salt over the cabbage and leave it to brine for two hours, turning the cabbage every 30 minutes to make sure that it's evenly coated in the salt.

03 In the meantime, blend the garlic, onion, ginger, fish sauce (or your alternative) and gochugaru (the more you use, the spicier the kimchi will be) in a food processor until it becomes a thick paste. After the two hours are up, rinse the cabbage thoroughly in cold water and drain.

04 Place the cabbage, radish or carrot and spring onions into a large bowl. Add the kimchi paste to the bowl and, using your hands, massage the paste into the vegetables until they're well covered. Make sure you wear gloves because the paste can burn your skin!

05 Next, pack the kimchi into your plastic container or glass jar, making sure to press the mixture down firmly so that it's submerged under the kimchi liquid. Make sure to leave 2-3cm gap between the top of the kimchi and the top of the jar, and then put the lid on.

06 Place the jar on a plate to catch any of the kimchi juice that may escape as it ferments. Leave the kimchi on the side to ferment at room temperature for two to three days. If you notice the vegetables rising above the liquid, make sure to press them back down.

07 After two to three days, you should notice that bubbles have formed at the top of the kimchi, which proves that it has been fermenting. It should smell and taste sour – if you're happy with the taste, place the kimchi in the fridge so it continues to ferment slowly.

08 If you would like your kimchi to be more sour then leave it at room temperature for up to a week, tasting each day until you're happy with it,

DID YOU KNOW?

Kimjang, the process of collectively making kimchi, is listed as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage

SERVINGS: 4 **PREP TIME:** 10 minutes **COOK TIME:** 15 minutes

BUDAE-JJIGAE

The fusion army stew, South Korea, 1953 – present

DID YOU KNOW?
'Budae-jjigae' literally translates to 'army base stew' in English, in reference to the dish's origins

INGREDIENTS

- 1 can luncheon meat (like Spam)
- 400g smoked sausage, sliced
- 1 large onion, sliced
- 170g kimchi
- 32g (¼ cup) Korean red pepper powder
- 3 tbsp soy sauce
- 3 tbsp gochujang
- 5 cloves of garlic, minced
- Ground black pepper
- 1 bunch of green onions, chopped
- 1.8l chicken broth
- 220g ramen noodles
- 1 slice of American cheese

METHOD

01 Slice the luncheon meat and place it into a stock pot. Layer the sausage, onion and kimchi on top, making sure to leave an empty space in the middle. If you're looking for a meat-free alternative, tofu works well.

02 In a small bowl, mix together your red pepper powder, gochujang, garlic and black pepper. If you have it available, you can also add soy sauce, fish sauce and rice wine to your stock. For those looking for a bit of heat, try adding some more red pepper powder.

03 Pour the mixture into the centre of your stock pot, add the chopped green onion and bring to the boil. Then reduce the heat and simmer for about ten minutes, stirring occasionally.

04 Bring a separate pot of water to the boil. When ready, add your ramen noodles (or rice if you prefer). Boil and stir for about two minutes – the noodles should only be partially cooked and softened.

05 Drain the noodles and add them to the simmering stew. Allow it to cook for five minutes, stirring occasionally. Your ramen noodles should be tender but firm.

06 Top with a slice of American cheese and serve immediately.

In the aftermath of the Korean War in the early 1950s, the country was divided. While the North turned into what is known today as the hermit kingdom, the South was more open. The United States had been heavily involved in the conflict, and troops stayed behind as the military stand-off showed no sign of ending.

There was an American army base in Uijeongbu near Seoul, and the soldiers stationed there had some of their home comforts such as canned beans, meat and Spam. Many of these items were completely new to post-war Koreans, but in a time when food was scarce parts of American cuisine began to be adopted by the local population. One of the results of this was a dish that's still popular today: budae-jjigae.

While many versions of this dish are served all across Korea, this is a slightly simplified version – but no less delicious! Other vegetables can be added, like mushrooms and Napa cabbage, and some recipes use baked beans and are served over white rice.

Image source: Alamy; Getty Images

SERVINGS: 4 **PREP TIME:** 25 minutes **COOK TIME:** 30 minutes

BIBIMBAP

As a symphony of colours, a bibimbap might just be the most appetising yet healthy comfort food you'll ever try!

INGREDIENTS

- 240 g | 8 1/2 oz | 1 cup jasmine rice
- 200 g | 7 oz sirloin beef steak
- 1 tbsp light soy sauce
- 2 tbsp sesame oil
- 2 tbsp granulated sugar
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tsp salt
- 200 g | 7 oz beansprouts
- 100 g | 3 1/2 oz spinach
- 1/2 tsp pepper
- 3 tbsp gochujang
- 1 tbsp water
- 1 tbsp sesame seeds, toasted
- 2 tbsp rice vinegar
- 2-3 tbsp vegetable oil
- 4 eggs
- 1 cucumber, julienned
- 1 carrot, julienned
- 8 tbsp kimchi (optional)

METHOD

01 Wash the rice and drain. Cook in a saucepan using 475 ml | 16 1/2 fl oz | 2 cups of water until the water has evaporated.

02 Cut the beef into very thin strips, about 1/2-1 cm | 1/4-1/2 in each. Mix the soy sauce, 1 tbsp of sesame oil, 1 tbsp of sugar and the minced garlic together. Marinate the beef in the mixture for 20 minutes.

03 Boil a separate pot of water, add half of the salt and put in the beansprouts. Cook for 20 minutes.

04 Blanch the spinach, seasoning well with the remaining salt and the pepper.

05 Mix the gochujang, water, sesame seeds, the remaining sesame oil and sugar, and vinegar together for the bibimbap sauce.

06 Cook the beef strips in 1-2 tbsp of vegetable oil in a high-heat pan for 2-3 minutes.

07 Fry each egg separately in the remaining vegetable oil.

08 Once everything is cooked, spoon the rice evenly into 4 bowls. Top with each vegetable in neat sections, then add the meat. Top with an egg in the middle.

09 Serve with the bibimbap sauce and kimchi.

TIP

For a dolsot bibimbap, slightly undercook the rice, then pop it in a skillet to achieve a golden, crackled crust.

This Korean rice dish is a comforting rainbow bowl of mixed vegetables and rice, sometimes topped with an egg or beef. One popular variant, the dolsot (hot stone) bibimbap, is perfect for winter; it's presented in a hot stone pot that crackles the rice as you eat, and is topped with raw egg and beef that cooks as you mix the ingredients together. There are infinite bibimbap topping possibilities: carrots, cucumbers, shiitake mushrooms, beansprouts, kimchi, peppers, spinach, gochujang (red pepper paste) and more, the availability of which would reflect the leftovers in a family's fridge as well as the rich agricultural history of Korea. Each ingredient offsets or balances another, creating an altogether harmonising dish.

Image source: Getty Images

Tourists are now encouraged to wear hanbok at Korea's major palaces

WORDS: Mark Dolan

HANBOK: TRADITIONAL KOREAN CLOTHING

Discover the fascinating history of Korea's vibrant and colourful traditional clothing

For thousands of years before Western clothing was brought to Korea in the late 19th century, South Koreans wore hanbok, literally 'Korean clothes'. Unlike other well-known Asian historical clothing, such as the kimono, hanbok does not denote a particular garment or style of clothing. Rather, it simply refers to all traditional Korean clothing, and the introduction of the term was intended to facilitate the differentiation between this traditional style and the modern Western clothes that were beginning to find their way into the everyday lives of Koreans.

Hanbok was, until just over a century ago, the daily dress for Koreans, but today it still remains a hugely important aspect of Korean life and culture. Although now rarely everyday wear, many people will don hanbok for special occasions, such as weddings, first birthdays and funerals. Recently, there has been a drive by the Korean government, supported by a host of designers and famous faces, to bring hanbok back as enjoyable daily clothing rather than the stiff formalwear it's become. To understand its importance to Koreans, though, it's important to trace the history of this fascinating subject.

THREE KINGDOMS PERIOD

The earliest visual evidence of hanbok comes from the Three Kingdoms Period (57 BCE – 668 CE), when the Korean peninsula was split into three kingdoms; those of Silla, Goguryeo and Baekje. In this period, we see the origins of the hanbok established: the basic composition that has remained in place to the present day. This consists of two primary elements: on the top, a garment called a jeogori, a jacket with a wrap front, with either baji (loose flowing trousers tied at the ankle with a cord known as a daenim) or chima (a long, flowing skirt). Both lower garments were worn by men and women, but it was most common for men to wear baji and women to wear chima.

Although in this period people from all three kingdoms would wear very similar hanbok, there were some minor differences. The Goguryeo Kingdom are said to have had similar hanbok to those of the Baekje Kingdom, which we know a little more about. The Baekje king is known to have worn a violet jeogori with blue silk baji, a white leather belt, gold or black leather hat and black leather shoes. Other Baekje courtiers would wear coloured gakdae (belts) to display their rank. In addition, Baekje hanbok would incorporate intricate embroidered designs and were more decorative than those of Silla, which were more often plain, though still used colour to differentiate between ranks. Silla, which had the closest relationship with Tang Dynasty China, had very similar clothing designs to their Chinese peers and generally the simplest hanbok of the Three Kingdoms.

GORYEO DYNASTY

The Kingdom of Silla eventually unified the Korean peninsula, conquering the Baekje and Goguryeo kingdoms with the aid of Tang China, and thus the style of hanbok popular in Silla continued to be worn into the Goryeo Dynasty (935-1392). During this period of prosperity and increased trade, hanbok began to become more ornate once again, while colours remained an important way of showing rank and status. Court officials in the early part of this period had to wear violet (a colour that had retained its royal associations), red and green. Increasingly in this period, garments were further adorned using gold, silver or copper thread woven through the fabric to create beautiful intricate patterns, and bold, vivid colours were commonplace.

Goryeo Dynasty Korea was a Buddhist state, and the influence of Buddhist artwork is clearly seen in the decoration and style of this era of hanbok. The two garments of jeogori and baji/chima continued to be the base of hanbok, but there was more flexibility in how they were worn, whether they were layered with jeogori or baji/chima on top or below.

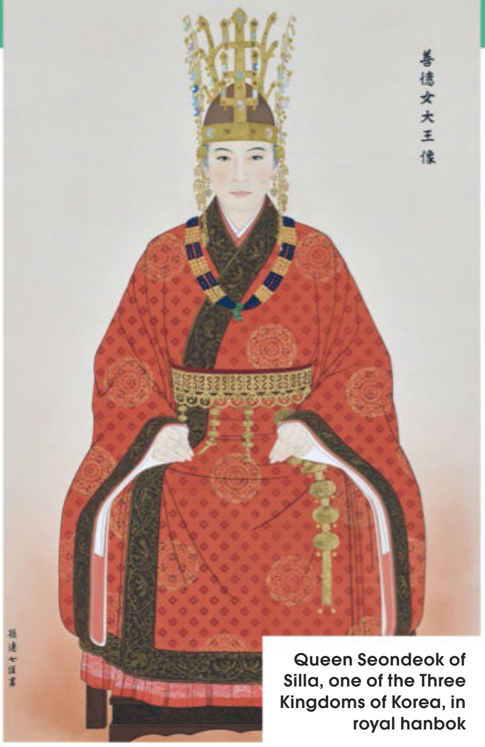
The other notable influence on hanbok in this period came from the Mongols. After a period of repeated invasion from the Mongol Empire, to whom they had to pay tribute from 1259-1356, the fashion of Goryeo coutiers began to change, with jeogori getting shorter and sleeves becoming curved according to the Mongolian style. Despite this, hanbok worn by the majority of the population were unchanged.

JOSEON DYNASTY

As Korea entered the Joseon Dynasty, the longest-lasting imperial dynasty in Korean history – lasting from 1392-1897 – hanbok had changed relatively little from those of the Three Kingdoms period. Perhaps the most significant difference between the Goryeo and Joseon Dynasties from a fashion point of view was the switch from a Buddhist state to a Confucian one. This had a profound effect on the development of hanbok in this period, out of which came the familiar modern version.

The Confucian principles that underlaid Joseon Dynasty Korea had various ramifications for hanbok, with perhaps the two most notable factors being the importance of maintaining social roles for keeping societal harmony and the taboo against women showing bare skin or the shape of their bodies through their clothes. The need for visible social distinction had precedents as far back as the Three Kingdoms period, but in the Joseon Dynasty this was taken to new levels. Rank and status could be signified by colour, fabric, shape and decoration, or a combination of all, and became so codified that you could learn a lot about a person's social position from their clothes.

Bright, vivid colours would often be worn by children, with middle-aged men and women donning more muted tones. Mothers would be dressed in navy and white, while unmarried women would often have a yellow jeogori and red chima. These bright colours were largely restricted to the upper and middle classes; working-class people would generally wear white, especially in the later Joseon period and under Japanese occupation, when a ban on wearing white (deemed unsanitary) made it an act of quiet resistance. The upper classes' hanbok were differentiated by fabric too:



Queen Seondeok of Silla, one of the Three Kingdoms of Korea, in royal hanbok

Hanbok has hit the runway in the 21st century

> “IN THE 1970S AND 1980S, HANBOK BEGAN TO EXPERIENCE A RESURGENCE AS CEREMONIAL COSTUME”

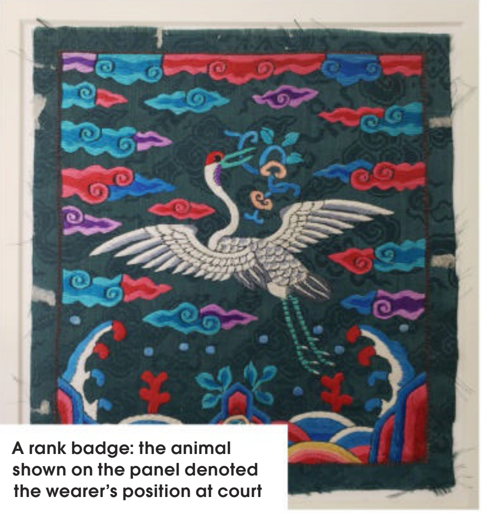
KOREAN MAGIC SOCKS

Now one of Korea's most popular souvenirs, beoseon are more than just socks

One part of traditional Korean clothing you may not expect to be laden with folklore and artistry are yosul beoseon, literally 'magic socks'. Beoseon developed in the Three Kingdoms period, when they were made of cotton, or silk for the upper classes. Featuring a distinctive shape, multiple layers of lining or quilting to make them warm and comfortable, and artistic embroidered designs, they became a quintessential part of hanbok. What makes them special, however, are their other traditional uses as lucky charms. In the Joseon period, housewives would take sketches of each family member's feet and make them bespoke beoseon, then collect the sketches in a pouch decorated with patterns of lucky flowers, such as chrysanthemums and peonies. This was thought to bring luck, wealth and long life. These women might also partake in the ritual of dongjiheonmal, where they would make beoseon for their husband's family at the beginning of winter to bring them longevity and fertility. They were even sometimes attached to earthenware pots with gold chains to drive away spirits – truly magic socks!

where most peoples' garments would be made from cotton, those of the upper classes were made of either ramie or silk.

Although mens' hanbok remained consistent in shape throughout the Joseon Dynasty, womenswear did undergo change, with the jeogori getting shorter and shorter, from 60 centimetres (24 inches) to around 20 centimetres (eight inches) by the early 20th century, with higher chima to match. Upper-class women would have more voluminous skirts, too, to indicate social position. The very highest echelons of society, royalty and their courtiers, would have much brighter and more ornate garments than the rest of society, consistently decked out in vibrant and luxurious colours and fabrics. Even in this rarefied air there were codified designs for certain ranks. Dragon imagery was the exclusive refrain of the king and his heir – the king's dragon would have five toes and the heir's four – and the queen would have phoenixes. Princesses and other royal consorts would have flowers embroidered on their clothes, and the rest of the courtiers would have specific animals, including tigers, geese and cranes representing their particular role in court. Many of these garments would be slightly different from the normal jeogori and chima combination, with specific garments such as the red jobok, black dallyeong and white sim-ui reserved for particular people (eg court officials, government officials, Confucian scholars) for specific events. On special occasions, lay people could depart from their white hanbok and wear more decorative garments inspired by court fashions and materials – especially silk – though these would still feature much paler tones than the courtiers'.



A rank badge: the animal shown on the panel denoted the wearer's position at court

By the very end of the Joseon Dynasty, just as Japan was working towards what would be annexation and colonisation, growing Western influence saw suits and dresses gaining popularity. New dress reform at the end of the period also saw Western-style clothing imposed on the military and police, and soon King Gojong, later Emperor Gojong, adopted Western military dress himself. This decision made Western clothing appear to be the high-status option, an appearance that pushed more upper-class men to switch to suits (most women continued to wear hanbok).

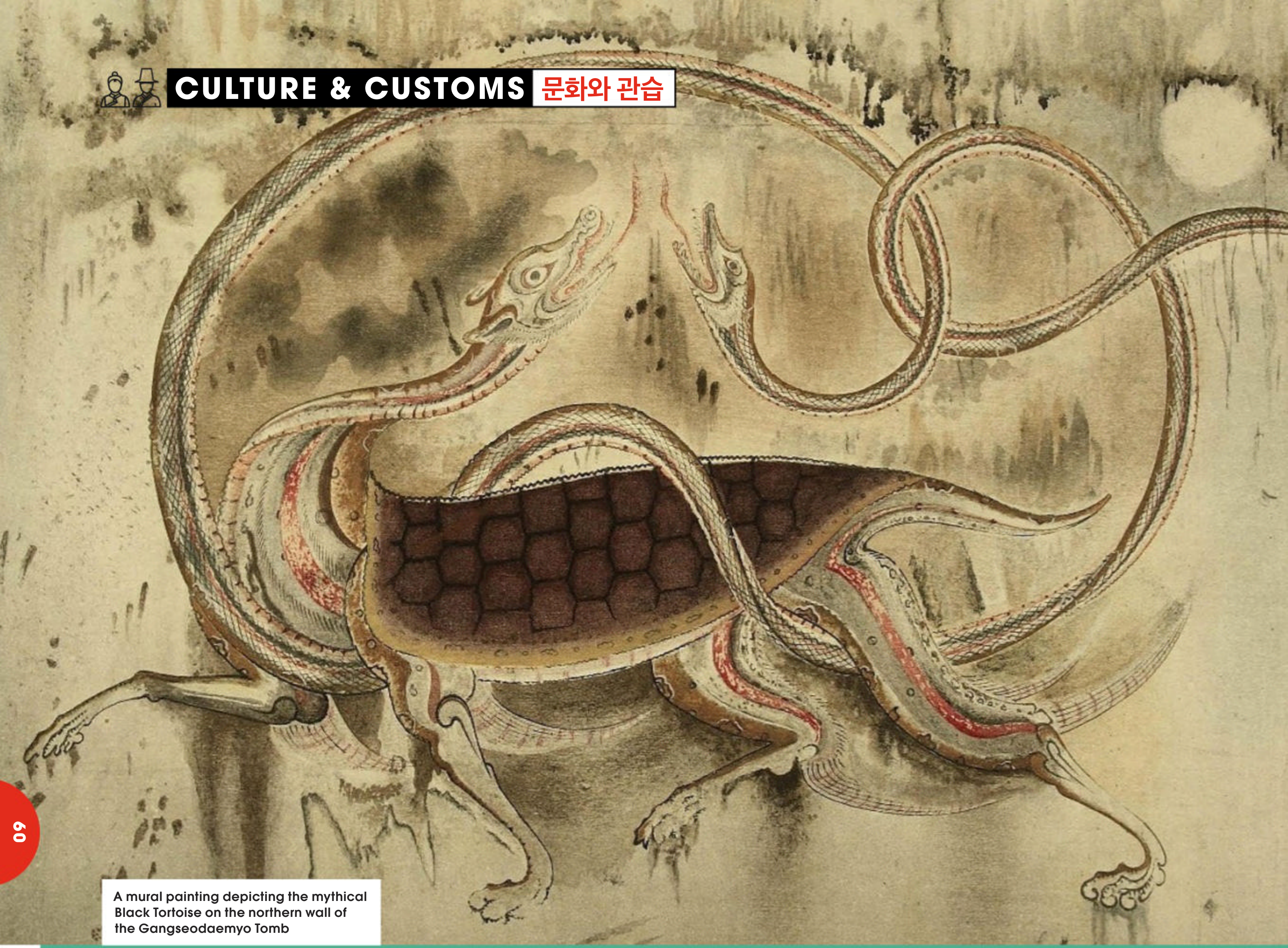
20TH CENTURY AND BEYOND

Following Gojong's switch to Western military garb, the subsequent Japanese colonial regime pushed Western clothing as part of its modernisation campaign. The cost of suits and dresses meant only the Japanese and the richest Koreans were able to afford them, so less affluent Koreans, whose clothes had traditionally been made at home, continued to wear hanbok. This created an association of Western clothing with wealth and modernity and hanbok with poverty and backwardness, something that persisted even after the liberation of Korea and the Korean War.

In the 1970s and 1980s, hanbok began to experience something of a resurgence as ceremonial costume for special occasions, with Koreans wearing traditional garments for events such as weddings, first birthdays and Lunar New Year. Recently, with the rise of Hallyu, hanbok has again undergone a revival. In 1996, the Korean government sought to give modern hanbok a boost as part of the Korean wave, dedicating 21 October as Hanbok Day, which celebrates the traditions of making and wearing traditional clothes. The push has been picked up by fashion designers in the years since, with Korean designers such as Lee Young-hee, Youngjin Kim, Park Seon-ok and Hwang Yi-seul all bringing modern versions of hanbok to runways. Even Western designers, like Karl Lagerfeld, have taken inspiration from the garments.

Another huge boost for hanbok comes from its growing popularity in K-pop. Some of the world's biggest K-pop stars, including BTS, BLACKPINK, Stray Kids and TWICE, have all worn hanbok or a variation of it in their music videos. This unprecedented global exposure has brought more attention to the style and it is now becoming more widespread, even being worn again as everyday clothing.

Image source: Alamy; Getty Images



A mural painting depicting the mythical Black Tortoise on the northern wall of the Gangseodaemyo Tomb

WORDS: Mark Dolan

EXPLORING KOREAN ART

Learn all about Korea's long and varied artistic tradition, incorporating painting, pottery, music and dance

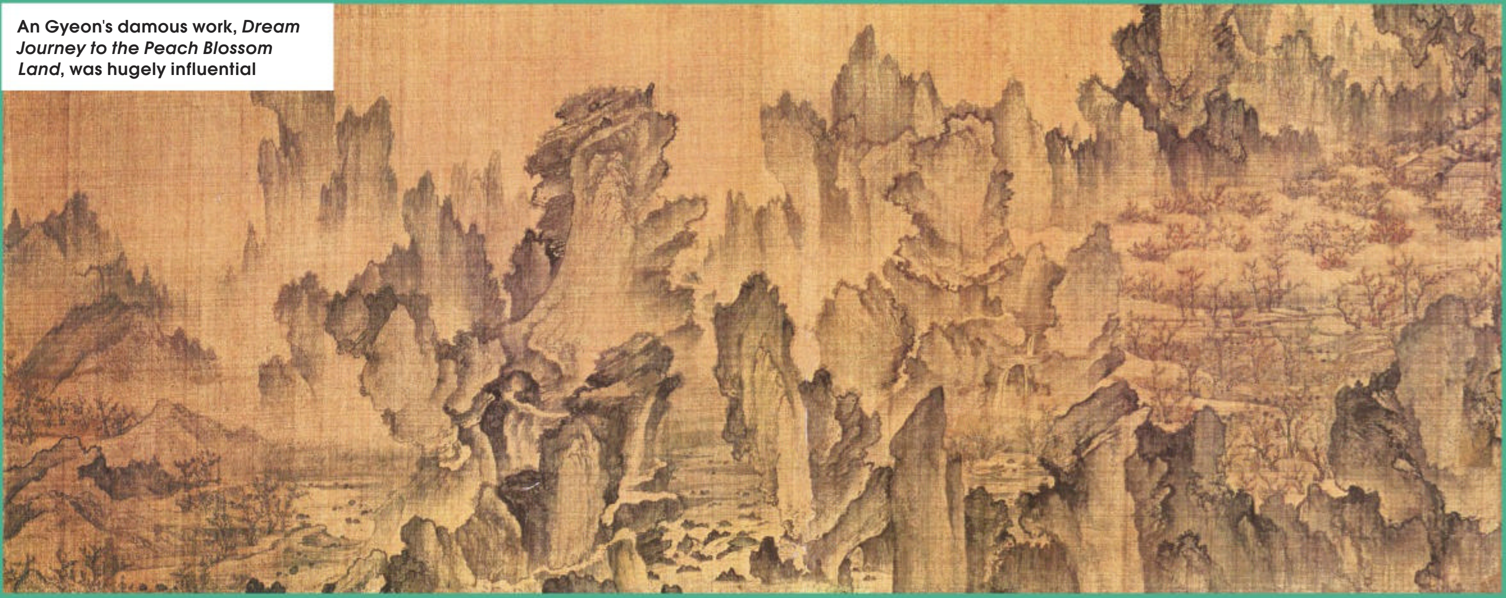
Korea is a nation of artistry. Its entire history is filled with paintings, sculptures and ceramic vessels, while music and dance have been enjoyed by rich and poor alike. Combining indigenous art with external influence; tweaking, changing and innovating at all times without ever losing sight of tradition, Korean art is a veritable treasure trove. It's no surprise so many pieces of Korean art, both physical and intangible, are recognised by UNESCO as priceless cultural heritage. In this article, we'll explore some of the most influential and unique art to have come out of this creative wellspring.

PAINTING

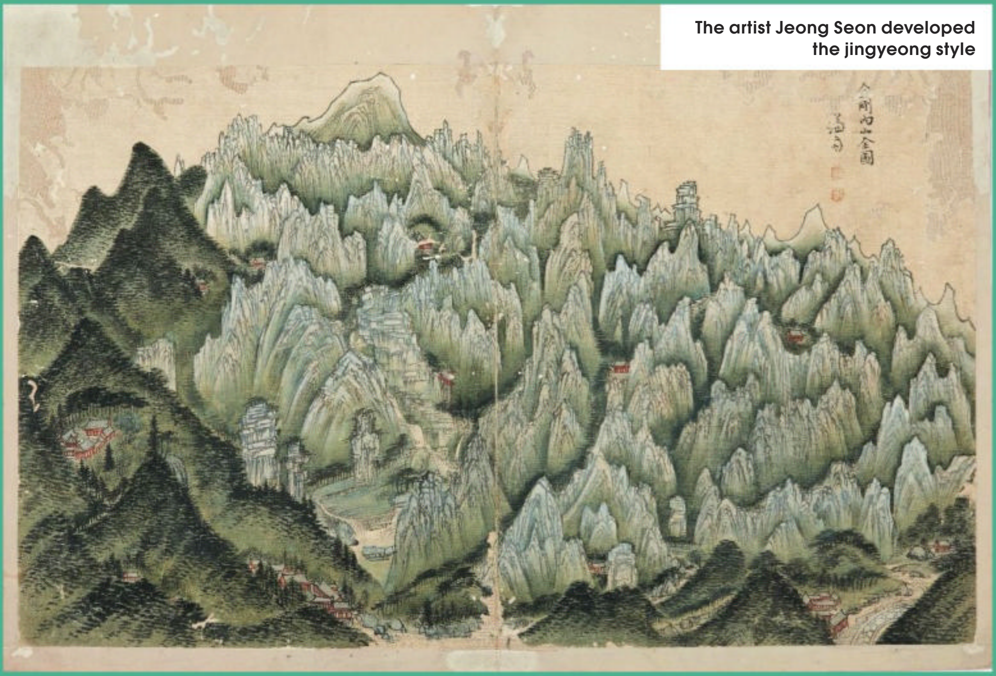
Evidence of painted art in Korea goes back to the Goguryeo Kingdom (37 BCE – 668 CE), where painted tomb murals reveal scenes of life, contemporary clothing and even some mythical creatures. Ever since this time, painting has been an important medium for artistic expression in the country, reaching its zenith in the early Joseon period, sometimes also referred to as the Korean Renaissance.

LANDSCAPE ART

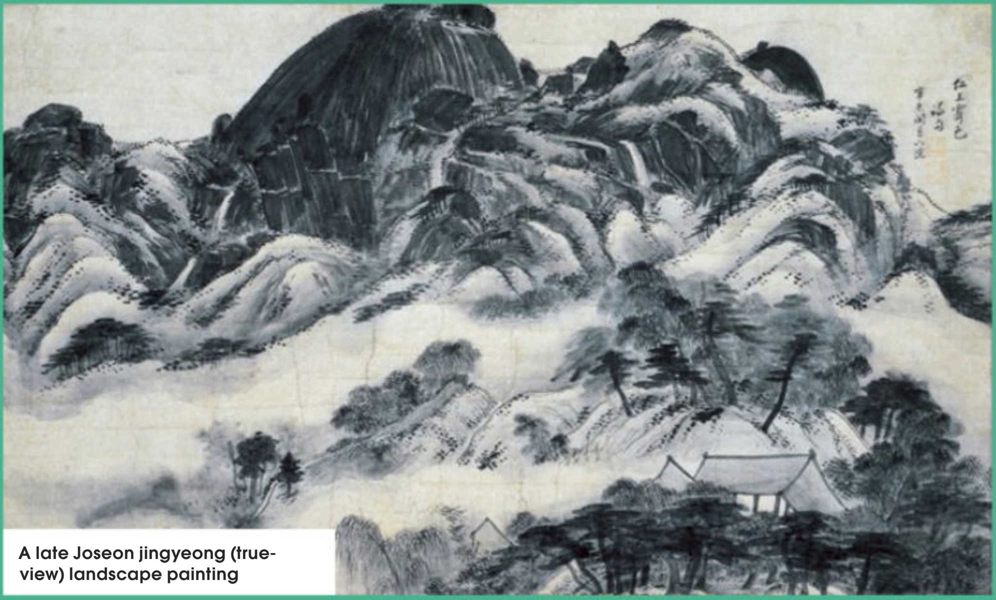
In the earlier Joseon Dynasty, the most popular type of paintings were landscapes, though not necessarily real ones. One artist dominated and shaped Korean landscape



An Gyeon's damous work, *Dream Journey to the Peach Blossom Land*, was hugely influential



The artist Jeong Seon developed the jingyeong style



A late Joseon jingyeong (true-view) landscape painting

> **"MANY OF THE GREATEST LANDSCAPE PAINTINGS FOLLOWED AN GYEON'S STYLE"**

painting in the early Joseon period: the court painter An Gyeon (who was active around 1440-70). An Gyeon's most famous and influential work, *Dream Journey to the Peach Blossom Land* (1447), depicts the fantastical world that was seen by his patron, Prince Anpyeong, in a dream. Many of the greatest landscape paintings in the following couple of centuries followed An Gyeon's style, which itself drew on Song Dynasty Chinese influences.

The second major development made in Joseon landscape painting came from a second artist, Jeong Seon (1676-1759). Jeong's innovation was jingyeong ('true-view' landscape painting), in other words, views that did exist in the country (although they would sometimes be idealised and embellished with lots of symbolic elements). His emotive and evocative depictions of Korea's landscape became hugely popular and influential for the following generations of landscape painters.

GENRE PAINTING

Despite the popularity of landscape painting, the art historian Eleanor Soo-ah Hyun calls genre painting one of "the most 'Korean' of all Korean art forms". Although genre paintings – scenes of daily life – date back to the Goguryeo tomb murals, they flourished in the 18th century, when there was a shift away from depicting the

yangban (the literati elite) to the everyday lives of the public. One of the most famous genre painters of this period, and possibly the most influential in bringing genre painting to the fore, was Kim Hong-do. Kim painted narrative scenes with a distinctive liveliness and is notable for being one of the earliest major painters to bring displays of emotion into his depictions of daily life.

MUNBANGDO

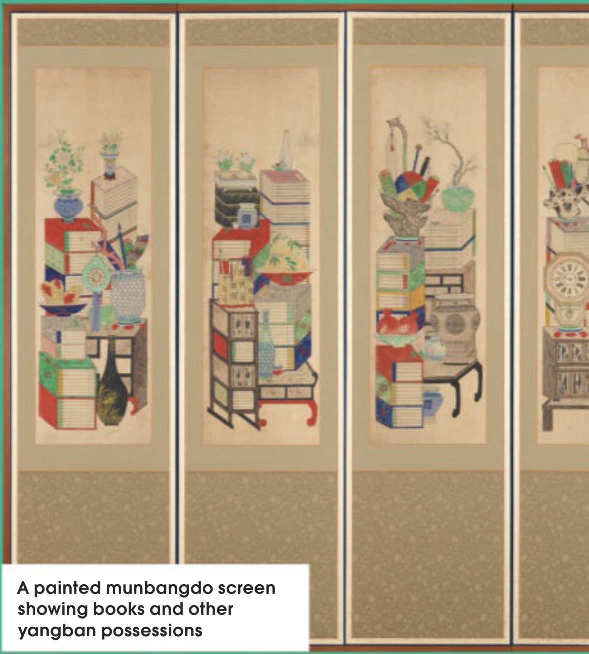
In addition to the landscape and genre paintings popular in the late Joseon period, there emerged one more unusual genre: munbangdo, or 'scholar's study painting'. These were paintings that directly alluded to the status of the yangban, who appealed to the Neo-Confucian ideals around the importance of education and literary fluency. Munbangdo paintings heavily featured books, but also other objects associated with the yangban lifestyle, such as inkpots and paper, and the exotic collectables cherished by the upper classes of Joseon society.

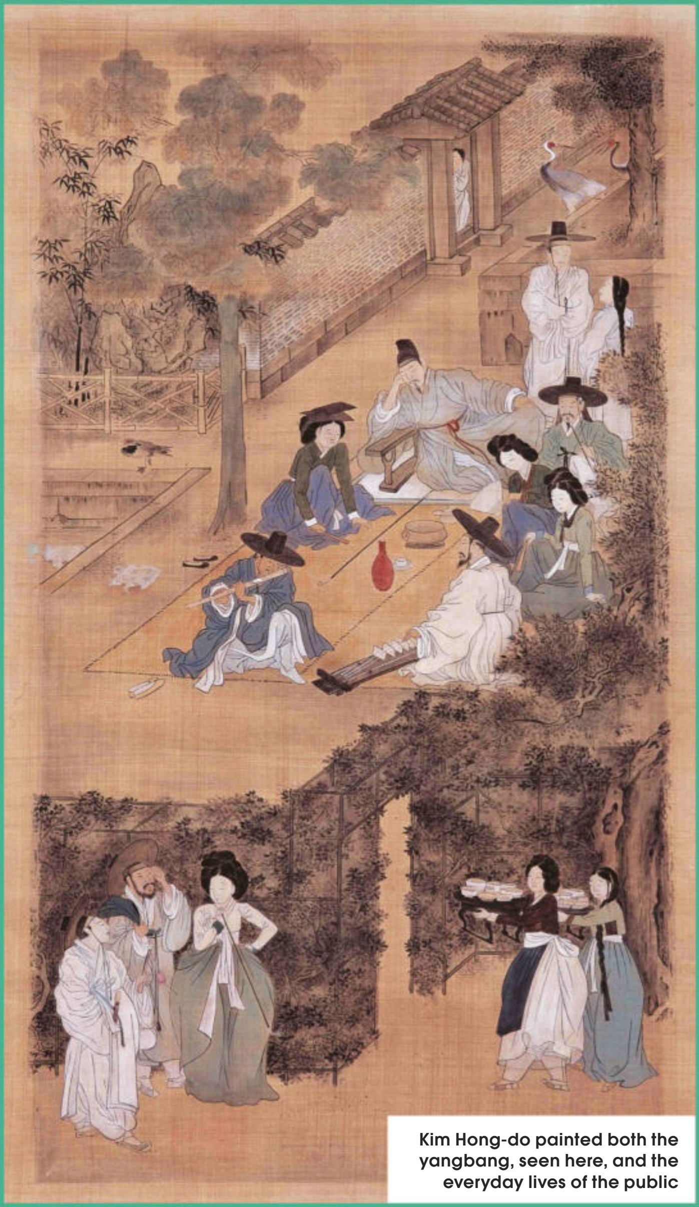
CERAMICS

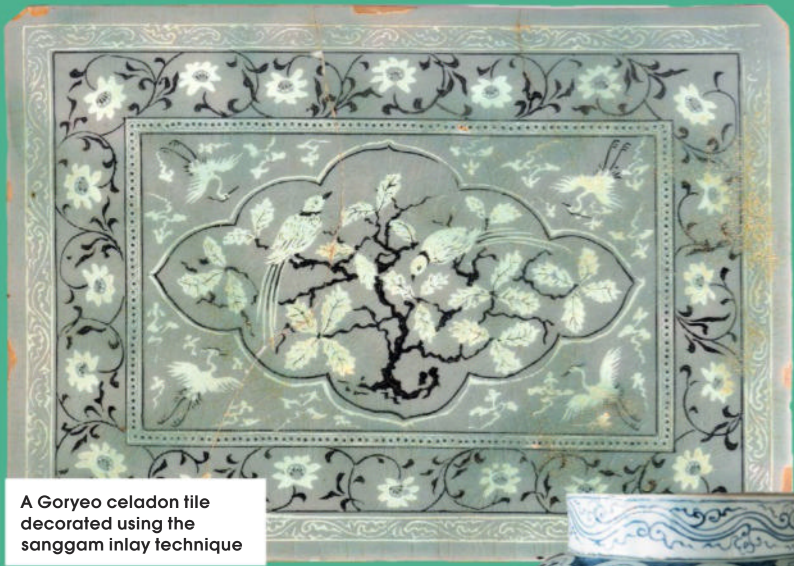
Some of the most highly regarded artworks to have come from Korea are ceramics. The first great ceramic wares from Korea came from the Goryeo Dynasty (918-1392), and was known as cheongja (blue-green celadon). The country's ceramic repertoire grew in the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1897), with the development of two further notable wares: buncheong and baekja.

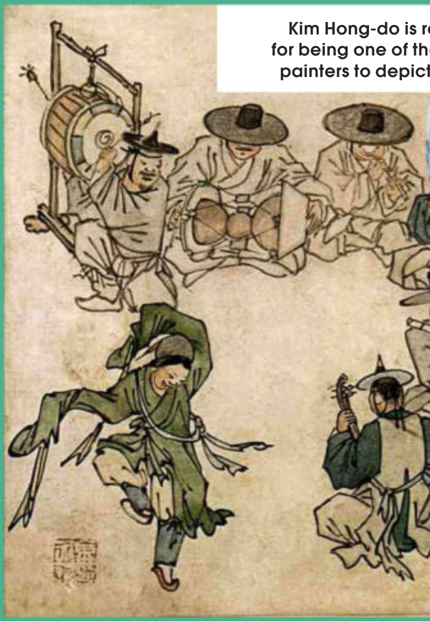
GORYEO CELADON (CHEONGJA)

Cheongja is characterised by the blue-green colour of its surface, inspired by similar ceramics from Song Dynasty China and achieved through a specific combination of materials and firing temperature. While many cheongja pieces were undecorated, made beautiful by the enchanting colour alone, many others were painted or

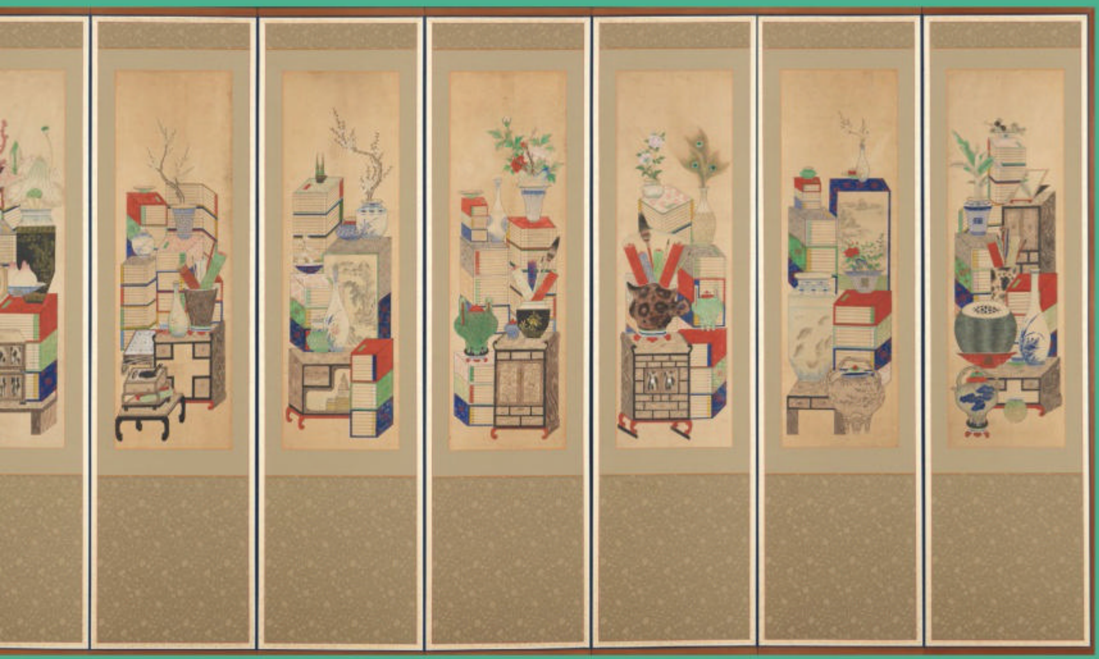

A painted munbangdo screen showing books and other yangban possessions


Kim Hong-do painted both the yangbang, seen here, and the everyday lives of the public


A Goryeo celadon tile decorated using the sanggam inlay technique


Kim Hong-do is renowned for being one of the earliest painters to depict emotion

A Joseon porcelain vase with a dragon motif in cobalt blue



> “ALTHOUGH CONSIDERED LESS ELEGANT THAN CHEONGJA, THE CHARM OF BUNCHEONG MADE IT WIDELY POPULAR”

decorated with a unique Korean inlay process known as sanggam, developed in the 12th century. This process involved etching designs into the clay, filling these with a black or white slip and sealing them with a transparent glaze. The designs often featured symbolic animals such as cranes and tigers, or flowers such as peonies and lotuses. Cheongja ceramics with sanggam inlays became hugely popular among the upper classes and were the tableware of choice for royals for the next two centuries.

JOSEON SLIPWARE (BUNCHEONG)

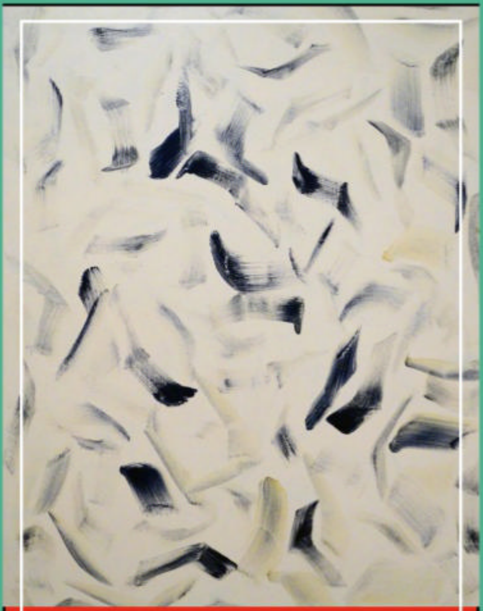
The successor of the famed Goryeo celadon ceramics was buncheong, produced in the first two centuries of the Joseon Dynasty. Buncheong adapted the sanggam inlay technique to create vessels that used a white slip under a transparent or green-tinted glaze, but would often feature stamped or freehand incised decoration. Although considered less elegant and even more experimental than cheongja, the charm of buncheong made it widely popular. There were recognisable regional styles within this tradition. Some regions' pottery would feature very refined, consistent designs, while other regions were more unique and bespoke; Chungcheong Province developed a unique style of painting using iron pigment that produced a vivid orange colour to contrast with the clean white slip.

JOSEON PORCELAIN (BAEKJA)

The dominant ceramics of the Joseon Dynasty, though, were made from perfectly white porcelain, known in Korea as baekja. White wares were adopted as the choice of the court in the 15th century, as they were in contemporary Ming China, and they became quickly sought after. The clean white finishes of porcelain were complemented by simple elegant shapes in the pottery of the Joseon Dynasty, with their popularity given a boost by the Neo-Confucianist ideals of the period, which emphasised minimalist and purist aesthetics. Later in the period, colour began to gain some popularity, made more emphatic by its contrast with the brilliant white background of the painted surfaces. Particularly prized were designs painted in vibrant cobalt blue and the rare red of copper pigment.

PERFORMING ARTS

It is not only the visual arts that are important in Korean culture; music, dance and the performing arts are central to numerous ceremonies, festivals and other events. Over generations, the country has



DANSAEKHWA

The modernist Korean art movement that rose from the ashes of the war

Korean art did not end with the demise of the Joseon Dynasty. Korean artists continued to innovate, even when their world was buffeted by brutal colonial occupation, division and war. A generation of Korean artists who grew up in these surroundings began producing works that reflected the struggle for national identity in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. The result was a movement now known as Dansaekhwa (or Tansaekhwa): Korean monochrome painting. A modernist, abstract style without colour, Dansaekhwa artists, such as Lee Ufan, Jin Ok-sun, Park Seo-bo, Chun Sang-wa and Ha Chong-Hyun, expressed the destruction of occupation and the war through the use of repetitive patterns, the tactility of their materials, and an engagement with destruction as a creative act.

Buncheong ceramics were very popular, with regions developing their own style

Dancers performing buchaechum, fan-dance

developed distinctive styles of music and performance incorporating traditional clothing, instruments and themes. In this section, we'll focus on three areas of this performing tradition: gugak (traditional music), arirang (folk song), and traditional folk dances.

GUGAK

Gugak is more an umbrella term than a particular performing art, literally meaning 'national music', but it encompasses a range of traditional songs, dances, ceremonial movements, and instruments. Korea's long history of musical performance, and the particular efforts of the 15th-century Joseon ruler, King Sejong, to reform court music, have led to gugak encompassing a varied smorgasbord of styles. Generally, it is split into five types: jeongak (or jeongga), court music enjoyed by the king and Joseon aristocracy; folk music such as pansori (musical storytelling), sanjo and japga enjoyed by the public; jeongjae, music and dance performed for the king at state events; buddhist and shamanic music and performance including salpuri, seungmu and beompae; and the poetic performances loved by the yangban, gagok and sijo. With more than 15 traditional instruments used across gugak's different musical genres, Korean traditional music is a vast and deep world of beauty and irreplaceable heritage.

ARIRANG

One of Korea's most distinctive performing arts is actually a single song. Well, sort of. Arirang is a generations-old folk song, but its popularity around the country has led to a proliferation of versions and variations. It's estimated there are over 3,600 variations of 60 different versions of the song. Throughout its history, different variations have been created and popularised, some becoming well-known versions, such as the Jeongseon Arirang – the most famous – the Jindo Arirang, and the Miryang Arirang. Despite the differences in lyrics and content, which range from prayers for peace or easy farming to professions of love, they all contain a refrain of 'arirang' or 'arariyo' and a recognisable sound. Today arirang is sung on many occasions, including national

The masked talchum dance originally satirised corrupt figures in power

The seungmu dance, or monk's robes dance, is a revered part of traditional Korean culture

> “ALONGSIDE MUSIC, KOREA HAS A WEALTH OF TRADITIONAL DANCES THAT ARE UNIQUE AND BEAUTIFUL”

sporting events, always bringing a sense of community and unity wherever it's heard.

FOLK DANCE

Alongside music, Korea has a wealth of traditional dances that are unique and beautiful. Among the vast catalogue of dances are gutchum, a shamanic ritual dance; salpurichum, a spiritual purification dance; and geommu, or sword dance. Others, such as talchum (a form of mask dance) and pungmul nori (a play with music) were known for satirising corrupt Joseon officials and having a close connection with rural communities.

Possibly the most famous Korean folk dance is seungmu, or monk's dance. This beautiful, elaborate dance is performed wearing long flowing white monk's robes with accompanying drums and is regarded as one of the most stunning of all Korea's traditional dances. Another unique dance known for its visual appeal is buchaechum, or fan dance. In this, dancers wearing bright hanbok use fans to create stunning visuals, such as butterflies and peonies, auspicious symbols in Korean culture. Still performed to this day, buchaechum is one of the best examples of the living heritage of the vast and varied world of Korean art.

The salpurichum dance is performed for purification and to get rid of evil spirits

Image source: Getty Images; Alamy; Met Museum; Wiki/ JEON HAN/ Lychi

WORDS: Hannah Grafton

A GUIDE TO SOUTH KOREAN ETIQUETTE

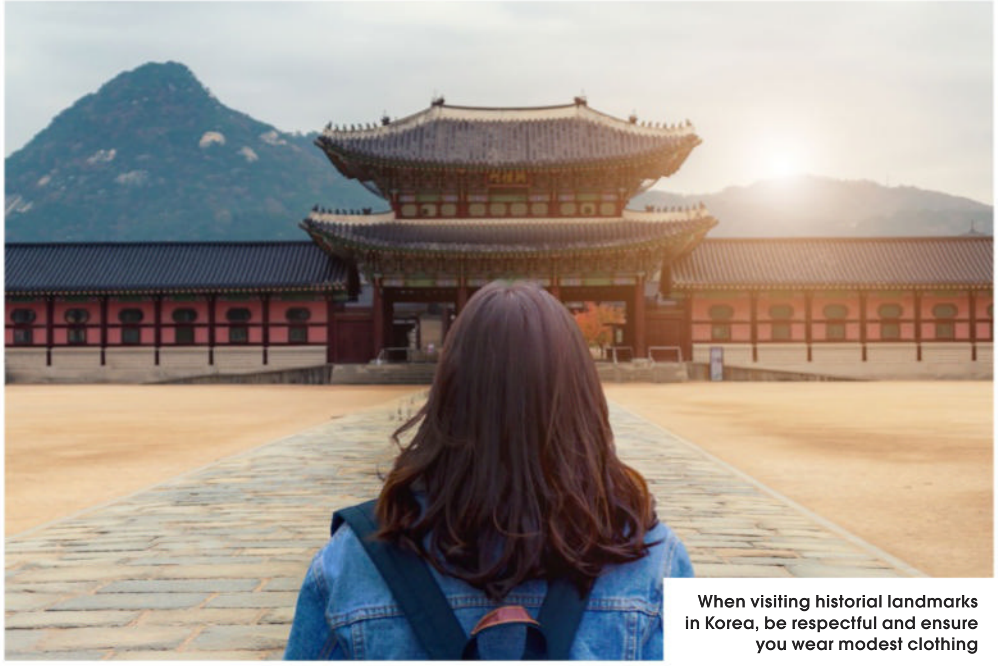
Use this as your guide to Korean etiquette, cultural norms, and behaviour so you can travel stress-free!

So you've packed your suitcase, exchanged your money for won, and perfected your greetings (more on those to come), but before you embark on your trip to South Korea, do you know about the country's delicate rules of etiquette? Just like many other countries in Asia, Korea's culture places a lot of importance on respect, so understanding what might and might not be perceived as rude is essential when visiting. But don't panic – you'll find everything you need to know about Korea's cultural code in the following pages.

But first, a small disclaimer. While etiquette is important, try not to get too hung up on rules and restrictions. Even within one country, perceptions of good manners can differ from person to person. In Western culture, for example, it's usually considered bad etiquette to put your elbows on the dinner table, speak with your mouth full, or run a few minutes late – which are things that we're all guilty of from time to time. All this is to say don't get too bogged down in having perfect etiquette when you're socialising in Korea. If in doubt, always follow the locals' lead and, most importantly, have fun!

WHERE KOREAN ETIQUETTE COMES FROM

It's important to not only understand what might be perceived as bad etiquette, but why. Among many historical factors, Korean etiquette mainly stems from Confucianism. In short, Confucius was a Chinese philosopher who promoted social harmony and shared compassion over individual values. Descendants of Confucius moved to Korea in the 14th century, but the basic ideology of putting others before yourself and maintaining harmony within a group remains today. In fact, modern-day Korea is said to be the most Confucian country not just in Asia, but in the entire world.



When visiting historial landmarks in Korea, be respectful and ensure you wear modest clothing

> "HUGGING IS A BIG NO-NO IN KOREA, WHERE PHYSICAL CONTACT IS RESERVED FOR CLOSE FRIENDS AND FAMILY – OR AFTER A FEW BOTTLES OF SOJU!"

Another cultural consideration is Koreans' respect for their elders. In Korea, the older you are, the more respect you deserve, and age can determine things like who pays for dinner or who gets on the bus first. Because of this, and the complex honorific language system, you might be asked your age when meeting new people. Don't be surprised if this question comes up a lot, especially if it's something you would normally consider rude or nosey!

A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION

Unlike in Western culture, Koreans don't usually address each other only by first name unless they're already good friends. Instead, the safest option is to use the person's full name, or just their given name once you've been introduced, followed by the honorific term '-shi' (씨), which is similar to Mr/Mrs/Ms in English. For example, 'Kim Min-ji shi', or 'Min-ji shi'.

When greeting strangers, saying goodbye, or thanking someone, a bow is usually your best bet. When bowing, lean forwards to about 45 degrees, keep your head down to avoid eye contact, and place your hands together in front of you. Handshakes are becoming more

Korea's senior population are afforded great respect, with age deciding things like who pays for dinner

Koreans rarely hug or shake hands when meeting – bowing is the standard greeting

common in business settings, although unlike Westerners, Koreans will always shake with both hands, placing their left hand between their right wrist and elbow. Supposedly, this practice dates back to the days of court intrigue, when people needed to show they weren't hiding a weapon. Hugging strangers is a big no-no in Korea, where physical contact is reserved only for close friends and family – or after a few bottles of soju!

AT THE DINNER TABLE

As is the case around the world, much of Korean socialising happens over food and drink. If you pour a drink for someone, just as is the case with handshakes, it's polite to use both your hands. Try to avoid pouring a drink for yourself as it can be seen as bad etiquette – if you pour others' drinks, they will almost always return the favour. With alcohol, the polite way to drink is to slightly turn away from others while you sip, particularly those who are older than you.

When you sit down to eat, your cutlery (chopsticks and spoon) will most likely be kept in a box on the table, or in a drawer underneath it. Napkins can also be found here, as well as bottle openers for beer – an essential companion to many Korean meals. You should offer other people food and drinks before yourself, and if someone serves you, receive your cup or bowl with both hands. A huge cultural taboo in Korea and other Asian countries is sticking chopsticks upright in a bowl of rice. This is said to look similar to incense sticks at a funeral and is reminiscent of death, so always rest your chopsticks on a napkin or your bowl, and avoid gesturing or pointing with them. If you are dining in a business setting, the most senior people in the group will often take the central area of a table, and the group will wait for them to start eating first.

Just as there are things Westerners do that Koreans might see as bad etiquette, the same is also true the other way around. Don't be surprised (and try not to stare) if you see people openly clearing their throats and spitting, or slurping their noodles loudly.

When you've finished eating, you may need to clear the table yourself – some chain restaurants and cafes have a return counter for used trays and dishes. Don't wait for staff to bring the bill to your table, as most meals are paid at the counter as you leave, and there's no need to leave a tip. It's assumed that good service is included in the price you pay, so Koreans can find receiving a tip awkward or uncomfortable. Some services, such as guided tours, do accept tips, so if you're ever unsure, simply ask politely.

SMART DRESSING

You'll find that Koreans dress in many diverse styles, with Korean street style being particularly chic and Insta-worthy. When visiting temples or other sacred sites, though, it's considered respectful to dress modestly, avoiding tank tops and skirts or shorts that are above the knee.

Koreans also have a deep-rooted custom of removing their shoes before entering homes or traditional spaces like guesthouses, temples, or hanoks. This shows respect for the space, along with keeping it as clean as possible. You'll know you're entering a shoe-free area if the entryway is slightly lower than the rest of the floor, leaving you with space to remove your shoes and replace them with indoor slippers, which are usually provided.

OUT AND ABOUT

When out in public, Korean people generally maintain a calm, respectful environment, so don't shout, play music, or speak loudly on the phone, especially on public transport. The Korean subway systems have designated seats for people in need: pink seats for people who are pregnant or with children, and a reserved section at the end of the carriage for elderly passengers. Be mindful not to use these seats if you don't fall into these categories – you'll find that even when the train is otherwise full, Koreans avoid them entirely.

Littering is something that isn't tolerated in most cultures, Korea included. However, there are very few public bins in Korea, so be mindful that you might have to carry rubbish

Even if you don't get everything right, the fact that you tried to follow a country's etiquette will be appreciated

Get used to removing your shoes in Korea, especially when visiting holy sites

On the Korean subway, always keep the reserved seats free for elderly and pregnant passengers

When eating out in Korea, be careful about where you leave your chopsticks

There are a number of etiquette rules to take into account when drinking with Koreans

> **“IF YOU’RE INVITED TO A KOREAN PERSON’S HOME, IT’S GOOD MANNERS TO BRING A GIFT FOR THE HOST”**

around with you, although most places where you’d stop for a snack or a drink will have their own bins, including convenience stores. It’s illegal to eat and drink on public buses and, while it’s still legal on trains, avoid any smelly or messy foods. Most Koreans do not eat and drink on the go at all – except, of course, their much-loved iced Americanos.

In cafes and restaurants, you’ll find that Korean people are a trustworthy bunch, and many leave their belongings on tables and seats while they order, take a smoke break, or go to the bathroom. While in Western culture you see people asking those around them to watch their belongings, there’s no need to do this in Korea.

If you’re invited to a Korean person’s home, it’s good manners to bring a gift for the host. Don’t worry about spending too much, though – baked goods or sweets are usually your best bet. If you write out a gift label, however, make sure not to use a red pen. Koreans write the names of deceased people in red ink, so doing the same with a living person indicates that you wish them dead!

MIND THE AJUMMA

While Korea is a very polite society, there is one slight exception to the rule. Some older Korean women, called ajummas (which translates as ‘aunt’) are known to physically move others out of the way on the subway, barrel past people on the pavement, and shout loudly on the phone. They might sound like a nuisance, but ajummas are a beloved and satirised part of Korean culture, so don’t be offended if you find yourself pushed aside by a pensioner!

Immersing yourself into new and different cultures is what travelling is all about. While Koreans don’t expect foreigners to act just like natives in social situations, getting to grips with basic etiquette and cultural norms will help you avoid any awkward situations, whether you’re in a business meeting or drinking at a pocha.

ESSENTIAL KOREAN PHRASES

Make your visit to coffee shops, restaurants, and convenience stores simple with these handy phrases

안녕하세요
Hello
an-nyeong-ha-se-yo

감사합니다
Thank you
gam-sa-ham-ni-da

만나서 반갑습니다
Nice to meet you
man-na-seo ban-gap-seum-ni-da

안녕히 계세요
Goodbye (if you’re leaving the other person – this is the ‘Goodbye’ you will use most as a tourist)
an-nyeong-hi gye-se-yo

안녕히 가세요
Goodbye (if you’re staying and the other person is leaving)
an-nyeong-hi ga-se-yo

죄송합니다
Sorry
joe-song-hab-ni-da

네
Yes
ne

아니요
No
a-ni-yo

__ 주세요
Please (said after whatever you’re asking for)
ju-se-yo

Image source: Alamy; Getty Images; Shutterstock

제오헤어
XEOHAIR
美容室
스낵전문점
명화당
SINCE 1980
2F
ARITAUM
CLUBCLIO
THE CLIGE

72

74

100

82

92

HALLYU

72 What is Hallyu?
74 The Rise of K-pop
82 The K-pop Phenomenon
92 South Korea on Screen
100 Get the K-Beauty Glow

WORDS: Mark Dolan

WHAT IS HALLYU?

An introduction to the 'Korean Wave' that has swept the globe

Tourists have flocked to South Korea thanks to Hallyu

> “FOR MANY, K-DRAMAS AND K-POP HAVE LED TO THEM DEVELOPING AN INTEREST IN OTHER ASPECTS OF KOREAN CULTURE, INCLUDING CUISINE, LITERATURE AND BEAUTY”

Hallyu, or the Korean Wave, has reached all over the world since its inception in the late 1990s. Today, South Korean culture, beauty, food, music and film are everywhere, but this isn't by accident – it is the result of a calculated campaign of soft power and the effect of cultural export.

The first half of the 20th century was not kind to Korea, beginning with the annexation and subsequent colonisation of the country by Japan, followed by division and war. Ravaged by oppression and conflict, there was a need for rapid development. By the 1990s, South Korea had developed – via dictatorships and stuttering back-and-forths in freedoms and access – into a varied landscape of modernity and cultural output. In the early 90s, the South Korean government began to recognise the power of media and cultural exports, when the box office profits from *Jurassic Park* (1993) outweighed those derived from the sale of 1.5 million Hyundai cars.

The Korean Wave has had a huge influence on the South Korean economy

Investment in the internet over the next five years and an explicit focus on promoting Korean output saw the birth of Hallyu, with K-dramas and K-pop finding enthusiastic new audiences in East Asia in the late 1990s and early 2000s. By the mid-2010s, Hallyu had made its way west, largely thanks to the popularity of K-pop – who can forget the viral success of PSY's megahit song ‘Gangnam Style’ – and its dissemination through social platforms such as YouTube. Today, some of the biggest artists in the world, such as BTS and BLACKPINK, hail from the world of K-pop, while K-dramas are appearing on worldwide streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime. For many consumers, K-dramas and K-pop have led to them developing an interest in other aspects of Korean culture, including cuisine, literature, beauty, technology and even learning the Korean language.

Unsurprisingly, the global interest in K-culture has had a massive impact on the South Korean economy. Hallyu has played a huge part in the significant increase in tourism to South Korea, with over 16 million foreigners visiting the country in 2024 and contributing over $6 billion to the economy. Meanwhile, global spending on Korean exports has continued to increase year-on-year, and it has been estimated that spending on K-culture products could reach $143 billion by 2030. With estimates such as these, it is clear that the Korean Wave is not going to lose steam any time soon.

Image source: Getty Images

WORDS: Dave Smith

THE RISE OF K-POP

How did southeast Asia's biggest-ever musical export get so huge? Read and learn...

The vivid images and sounds of the K-pop movement are so vibrantly 21st-century that it's hard to imagine a time when the music didn't exist – but like any cultural endeavour, it's built on roots that penetrate deep into its home country's social, cultural and even political history. Let's jump back to half a century BBTS (Before BTS) and figure out how this cutting-edge phenomenon gradually evolved.

Consider the big historical picture. Did you know that Korea was split into North and South territories in 1945 after it was liberated from the Japanese? You do now. Five years later, the Korean War broke out between the two new countries and raged for three years, aided on either side by the West and the Soviet Union. For our purposes, the biggest impact of that conflict was that the American soldiers who had been stationed in South

BTS have taken the world by storm over the last few years

> **"KOREAN MANAGEMENT COMPANIES HAD LEARNED LESSONS FROM THE ESTABLISHED J-POP MOVEMENT"**

Korea introduced Western music into the country, whose population soon became aware of American rock'n'roll and then The Beatles. Domestic rock bands emerged, and the scene was set for Korean pop music to thrive.

Jump to the 1980s, and ballad singers were all the rage in South Korea. Huge-selling musicians such as Lee Kwang-jo and Cho Yong-pil ruled the airwaves, the former hitting big with the 1985 album *You're Too Far Away To Get Close To* and the latter breaking records as the first Korean singer to play at New York's Carnegie Hall. He also sang the song 'Seoul Seoul Seoul' in Korean, English and Japanese at the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games, itself an important factor in growing worldwide awareness of the country.

By the 1990s, an early form of K-pop was already in place, although the music was based more on American hip-hop, new jack swing and electronic dance music than a truly indigenous sound. The trio Seo Taiji And Boys first came to wider attention when they played a talent show on the domestic MBC channel, and spearheaded a new wave of acts whose R&B and urban sounds began to include a recognisably Korean feel: these included Yoo Seung-jun, Deux and Drunken Tiger.

A teenage audience was now coalescing around this new sound, and the Korean music industry stepped up to meet that demand, producing 'idol' bands of impeccably dressed, good-looking, athletic singers whose dance moves matched their slick vocals. One of these, a boy band called H.O.T., was hugely influential, with a wave of groups following in their footsteps that included NRG, Baby V.O.X., Diva and Shinhwa.

By now, Korean management companies had learned lessons from the established J-pop movement, specifically that a successful pop idol must excel in all areas, not simply in looks and vocal range. As time passed, the latest pop stars to emerge began to resemble supermodels, with chiselled physiques, excellent manners, evolved interview skills – better known as 'media training' in the West – and a dose of charisma that felt very real. These singers were in place by the end of the 1990s, just in time for the arrival of Hallyu.

H.O.T., pictured here in 1997, were one of K-pop's favourite exports

South Korean films like *Parasite* have contributed to the Korean Wave

AleXa is one of the many K-pop artists collaborating with overseas singers

GIFT
SHINee
GENERATION

K-pop merchandise is becoming increasingly popular, both in and outside of South Korea

Seo Taiji and Boys paved the way for the development of K-pop

As you'll have read elsewhere, Hallyu equates to 'Korean wave': the rapid rise in popularity across the world of Korean culture. Before the 2000s, if you'd asked the average Westerner to name a Korean cultural release, they would have been unable to do so. By 2005, even the most switched-on Brit or American might only have named the action film *Oldboy*, but now, most people with an interest in world culture would be able to list the films *Parasite* and *Train to Busan*, as well as the TV show *Squid Game*, Psy's mega-hit 'Gangnam Style', the Walking Dead actor Steven Yeun, and, of course, the K-pop titans BTS, revealing the global impact of Hallyu.

Not that it's been plain sailing for every K-pop act. Like all major tectonic shifts in popular culture, bands have come and gone, sometimes traumatically, even though the broader movement of the music continued upwards. In fact, K-pop as a whole didn't have the best 1990s, despite the promising early years of the decade: several of the biggest bands, including Sechs Kies and the formerly blazing H.O.T., didn't survive long after the new millennium dawned.

It took another few years for the sound that we now recognise as current K-pop to find a foothold again, with the boy band TVXQ carving out a niche by the middle of the 2000s and a whole new second generation of acts coming out in their wake. Among these were many names familiar to fans of the genre – SS501, Big Bang, Super Junior, Wonder Girls, SHINee, Kara, 2NE1, T-ara and After School among them.

Once this new wave of bands began to break, it seemed unstoppable. Just as Cho Yong-pil had done two decades before when he allied a huge hit with the Seoul Olympics, Baby V.O.X. and the single 'Coincidence' made serious traction because it was released during the 2002 FIFA World Cup in South Korea. The combination of an international sporting event and anthemic single is a powerful one, evoking as it does emotions of determination, solidarity and triumph, and the entire K-pop movement benefited from this synergy.

Merchandise is one of the main money-earners in K-pop
CALL ME BABY
BABY

"THE IDOL MOVEMENT WAS PARTICULARLY POPULAR, ESPECIALLY ONCE K-POP EXPANDED BEYOND KOREA AND WENT INTERNATIONAL"

Second generation K-pop group After School performing at the 2021 Hallyu Dream Festival

PSY's 'Gangnam Style' became a global phenomenon

The idol movement was particularly popular, especially once K-pop expanded beyond Korea and went international. The first of these new artists to top the Japanese charts was BoA, while the idol group Baby V.O.X. did the same in China with the massive single 'I'm Still Loving You'. The latter group also enjoyed widespread success in Thailand, proving that international borders and different political ideologies are no match for the inexorable spread of 'soft power' – in other words, money that is made through gentle persuasion rather than the threat of violence.

Once the boy band TVXQ had followed BoA to the top of the Japanese hit parade with their single 'Purple Line', the invasion of K-pop throughout southeast Asia – and beyond – was up and running. It's routine nowadays to see K-pop merchandise and concert tickets bought and sold in the UK, Europe and North America, but this has only been the case for the last decade or so. Before that, the necessary market penetration had simply not occurred, which is why it was so important for the K-pop vanguard to expand in increments: first into Japan, then into China, and then into India, now a huge market for the music.

Of course, Psy's 'Gangnam Style' – not just the biggest hit single of 2012, but also the world's most influential creative release in any medium – was responsible for at least some of this progress. On the surface, the song is simply an amusing slice of danceable pop: dig a little deeper into the thinking behind it, though, and you'll see how much business acumen went into it. For starters, it included a new word to Western audiences in its title, one which forced people outside Korea to ask and then understand that a glamorous district called Gangnam is part of the city of Seoul, where money and style are paramount and where Western and Eastern businesses can work together.

In addition – and this was the really clever part – the makers of 'Gangnam Style' understood that the most important part of the song was not the music, it was the accompanying video. In 2012, almost a decade before the rise of TikTok, YouTube was the dominant platform for video in the West. At the same time, smartphones that could run video clips were still relatively new, but their sales were increasing at a monstrous rate. Release an amusing video with a funny dance move (the 'invisible horse dance' performed by Psy) into that environment, and you have the potential for a hit.

That said, no-one could have predicted quite how huge 'Gangnam Style' would be.

H.O.T. had a hugely successful career in the 1990s

The key fact – that the video became the first YouTube clip to hit a staggering one billion views – helped to catapult the song to even wider attention. The message that Korea was no longer in the creative shadow of the world's leading nations, but actually outperforming them, was made very clear indeed. We now knew that Korea was a centre of creative excellence… and we wanted more.

This leads us, of course, to BTS, the genuine leaders of the K-pop movement, and one of the biggest cultural phenomena ever to have existed. As you'll find out from our coverage elsewhere in this publication, the seven-piece formed in 2010 and within seven years had taken the US by storm, winning Top Social Artist at the 2017 *Billboard* Music Awards, performing at the American Music Awards, and hitting the top of the *Billboard* charts a year later with the album *Love Yourself: Tear*. The sheer weight of the group's brand has seen them dominate throughout India and Japan and build significant fanbases throughout the West. They even became the first Asian commercial partners with McDonald's in over half a century, if you want evidence of their cultural and commercial penetration.

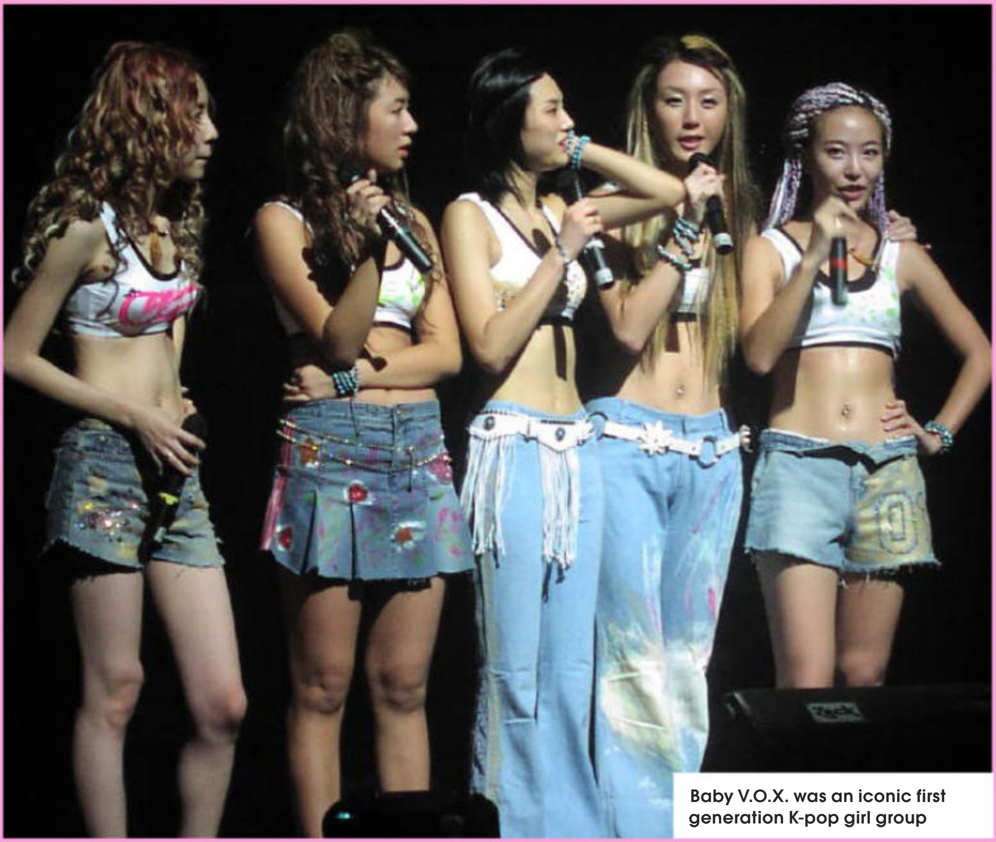
Over the last decade, the genre of K-pop has continued to spread around the world,

SS501 photographed two years before their hiatus

Many K-pop groups have performed abroad

BTS IDOL
BTS IDOL

BTS perform live on *Good Morning America* in September 2018



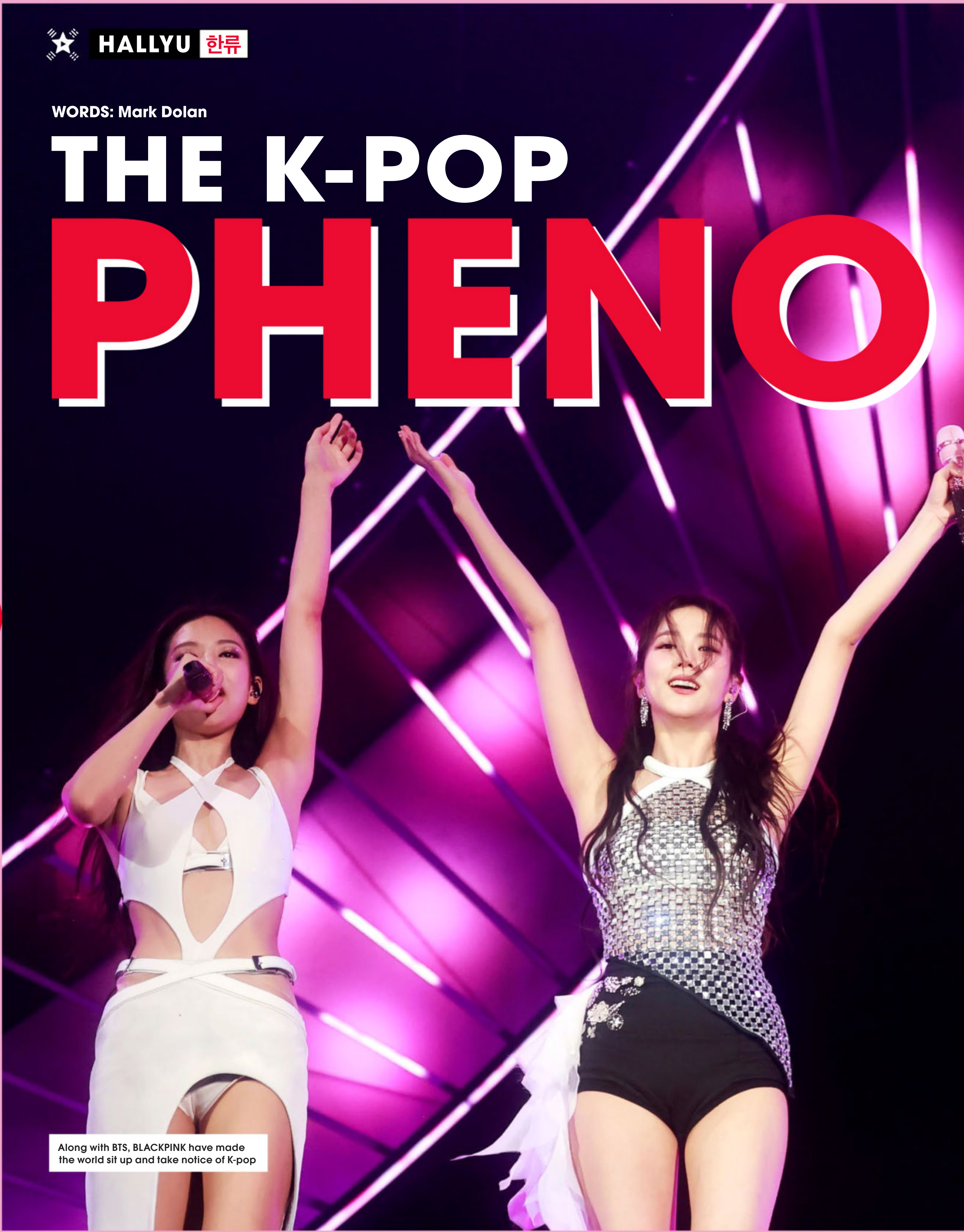
Baby V.O.X. was an iconic first generation K-pop girl group

> **“THIS LEADS US, OF COURSE, TO BTS, THE GENUINE LEADERS OF THE K-POP MOVEMENT”**

and we'll tell you one of the reasons why. In a well-gauged attempt to familiarise overseas audiences with Korean artists, musical collaborations between K-pop acts and local musicians have been released in several countries, with audiences enthusiastically buying into the concept. Psy kicked this off by recording with American rapper Snoop Dogg in 2014, while the Kuwaiti artist Bader Al Shuaibi paired up with AleXa in 2021, as did Eric Nam with Armaan Malik. These collaborations have become increasingly successful and more frequent in recent years, which you'll learn about over the next few pages.

It is clear that K-pop has become a truly unstoppable force that, arguably, nobody could have imagined when it first emerged in the 1990s – and it just keeps getting better.

Image source: Wiki; Getty Images



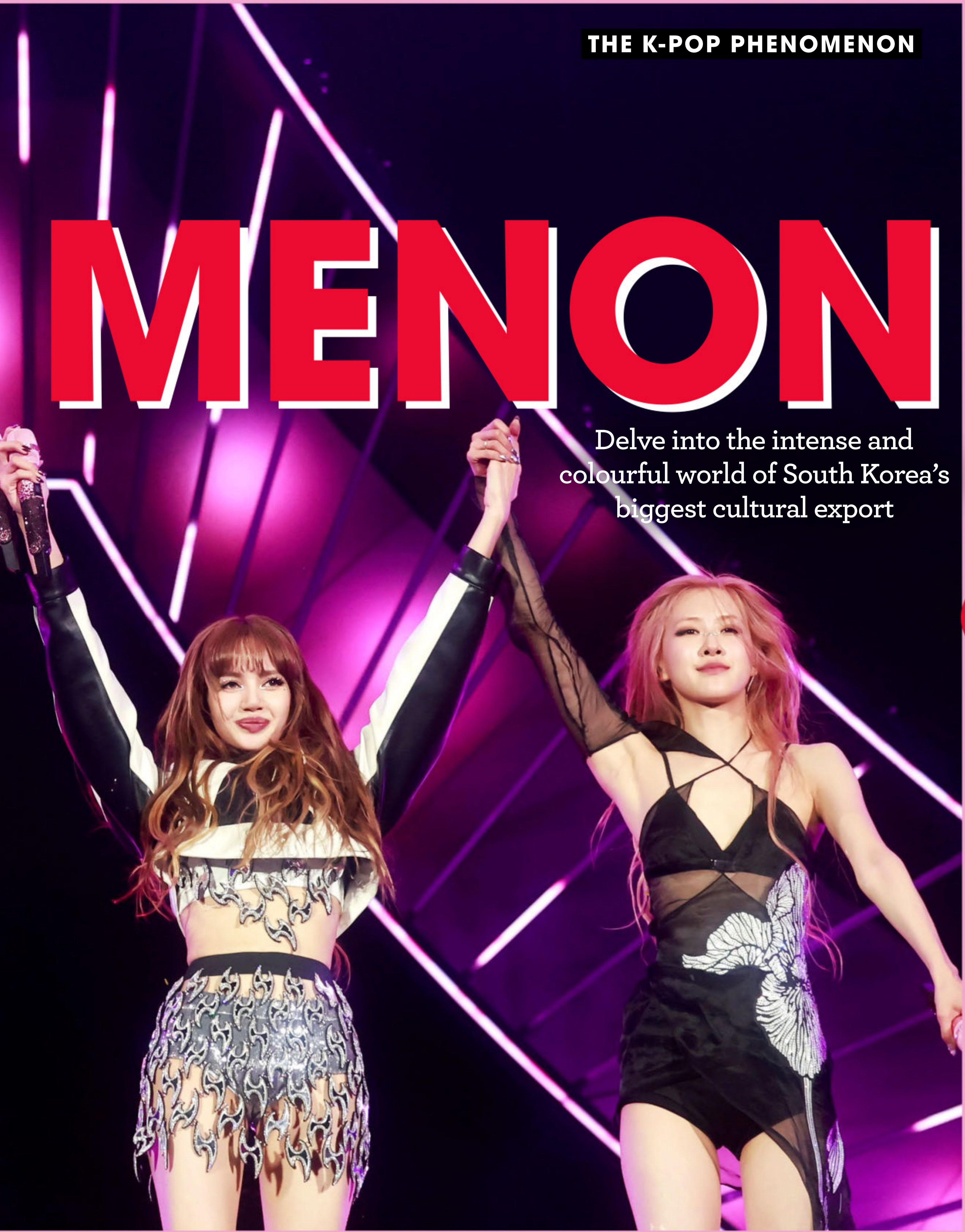
WORDS: Mark Dolan

THE K-POP
PHENO

Along with BTS, BLACKPINK have made the world sit up and take notice of K-pop

MENON

Delve into the intense and colourful world of South Korea's biggest cultural export



K-pop, or Korean popular music, is possibly the most significant cultural export of Korea in the 21st century. It began, in its modern sense, in the 1990s with the boyband Seo Taiji and Boys, who experimented with a range of Western music styles and created a distinctive hip-hop-inspired pop sound. PSY's 'Gangnam Style' brought the genre to the attention of the Western world but it was the boyband BTS who managed to show the universe that this was a cultural phenomenon worth paying attention to. In this article, we'll see how BTS came to be one of the biggest artists in the world, and the effects of the group's unfettered popularity. From the generations of artists who came through, alongside and after them, to some of the key features of today's K-pop scene, the world of K-pop is as fascinating as it is inescapable.

BTS – FROM BREAKTHROUGH TO GLOBAL DOMINATION

It is no exaggeration to say that without BTS, K-pop in the West would look very different. The seven-member group, made up of j-hope, SUGA, RM, Jung Kook, Jimin, V and Jin, spearheaded the incredible explosion of K-pop in the Western world, taking America especially by storm after their breakthrough in 2017. The group debuted four years earlier, just one year after 'Gangnam Style' went stratospheric. Managed by an agency far smaller than the Big Three (YG, SM and JYP Entertainment), BTS were underdogs at the outset, yet managed to break the States in a way that was far from common at the time. Many K-pop groups had a crack at America fairly early on and often had moderate – if unspectacular – success, with their agencies soon turning attention back to more familiar markets, such as Japan.

BTS's trajectory looked to be similar in late 2014 when a surprise show in LA attracted just 400 people, their album *Dark & Wild* made no splash, and a genuinely strange collaboration with 90s rappers Coolio and Warren G had no impact – unsurprisingly, perhaps – on their Stateside popularity. Their fortunes were turned around partly thanks to the insight of Big Hit founder, Bang Si-Hyuk, who masterminded the musical and aesthetic composition of their 2015 album, *The Most Beautiful Moment in Life Pt.1*. This album hit the zeitgeist for the burgeoning K-pop market that was present in the US. The new look and altered sound aligned with long-standing features of the group, particularly their authenticity and direct involvement in songwriting and choreography. The summer after the release of *The Most Beautiful Moment*, they played four US shows to an average audience of 4,000 – ten times more than had attended their LA show the year before, and the follow-up, *The Most Beautiful Moment in Life Pt.2*, marked their first appearance on the Billboard 200.

Thanks to the hard work of BTS, K-pop is known – and loved – all over the world

BTS performing on *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon* in 2020, helping reach a Western audience

> "BTS REVOLUTIONISED K-POP ON THE GLOBAL STAGE AND PAVED THE WAY FOR OTHERS TO FOLLOW IN THEIR WAKE"

From this point, BTS have gone from strength to strength, securing their first Billboard 200 number one in 2018 with the *Love Yourself 'Tear'* album, and never looking back. Seeing sales and streaming records fall at their feet, accolades rain down on them, fans fawn over everything they do and generations of subsequent groups following the blueprint they innovated, they are now one of, if not the biggest pop group in world music. Regularly smashing through the 1 billion streams mark (and even 2 billion with 2020's 'Dynamite'), there's no doubting that BTS revolutionised K-pop on the global stage and paved the way for others to follow in their wake.

THIRD-GENERATION GROUPS BREAKING THE WEST

Despite the unprecedented success of BTS, they were far from the only third-generation K-pop group to be making huge inroads into the Western market. Various other groups who debuted around 2014-16 broke through into the West in similarly unstoppable fashion. Three of the most successful to have done so are BLACKPINK, TWICE, and Seventeen. All of these groups saw their international profiles rising alongside those of BTS.

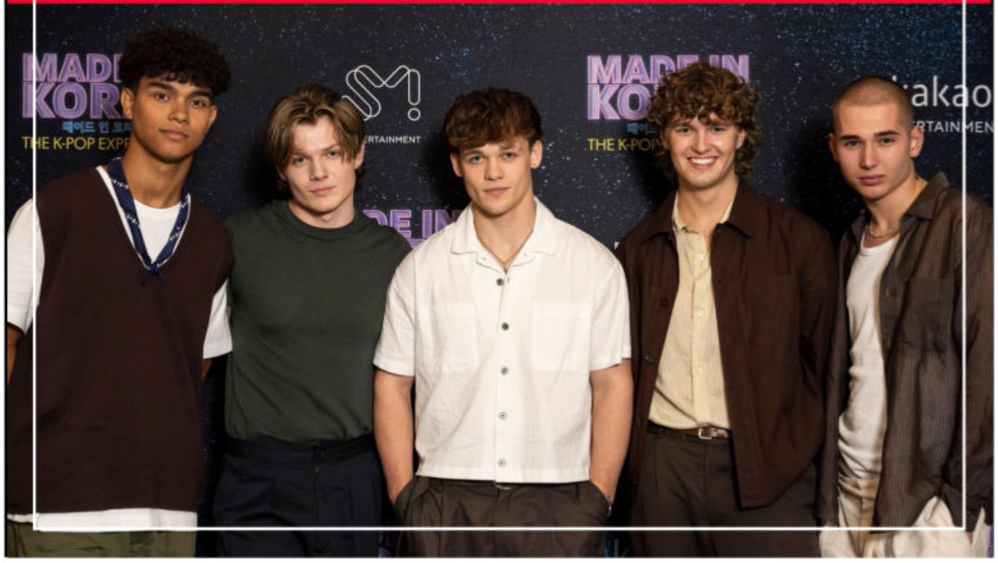
BLACKPINK debuted in 2016, and their intentions to reach a global audience were present from their very first single,

BLACKPINK made history when they headlined Coachella

K-POP FUSION

The West has woken up and taken notice of the K-pop machine

The K-pop model involves signing up young musical prodigies and putting them through a gruelling years-long training programme, where they practice all the key things K-pop idols need to master: singing, dancing, rapping, and combining them all breathlessly. Groups are put together by agency execs, but this is often done through televised competitions where the trainees either compete for spots in a new group or get tested to their limits as a unit. Recently, UK and US music labels have seen the potential benefits of a fusion approach, importing the Korean model with English-language groups. A UK collaboration between SM Entertainment (one of the 'Big Three' Korean music agencies) and Moon&Back Media saw a fledgling boyband named Dear Alice put through the famously tough K-pop training process as part of a BBC show called *Made in Korea*. Billed as "a music experiment like no other", it was quite like the Netflix series *Pop Star Academy: KATSEYE* in which 20 girls competed to debut as part of the K-pop style group, KATSEYE. This show, too, was a Korean-Western collaboration, this time between HYBE (the agency responsible for BTS) and Geffen Records, the label of Olivia Rodrigo and Billie Eilish, among others.



> **"DESPITE THE POPULARITY OF K-POP IN AMERICA, THE UK HAS BEEN A MORE DIFFICULT MARKET FOR ARTISTS TO BREAK"**

BOOMBAYAH, which opened with the refrain "BLACKPINK in your area", a catchphrase that would come to define the group as they quickly rose to prominence. A succession of singles and EPs between 2016 and 2020 brought BLACKPINK's members – Lisa, Jisoo, Jennie and Rosé – to wider attention. In these four years, prior to the release of their first full album, the aptly-named *THE ALBUM*, they broke dozens of chart and performing records, including; first K-pop girl group to top the Billboard Hot 100; most-viewed K-pop music video; biggest music video debut (twice); first K-pop group video to hit 1 billion views; three Guinness World Records (most viewed K-pop group video in 24 hours; most viewed music video in 24 hours and most viewed video in 24 hours) for 'How You Like That', (beating BTS in all three categories); and first female K-pop group to win a VMA. As if that weren't enough, they went on to become the most-subscribed artist on YouTube, overtaking Justin Bieber in 2021 (and reaching 75 million nine months later), the first K-pop girl group to top the Billboard 200 chart and the first Asian act to headline Coachella, four years after their first performance at the festival. BLACKPINK's success in the West showed that BTS weren't an anomaly but simply a trailblazer.

TWICE, a nine-piece girl group that debuted in 2015, are another of the third-generation K-pop acts who have a genuinely international appeal. With a cutesy bubblegum pop sound and colourful aesthetic, coupled with a work ethic and prolific output that is impressive even in the intense world of K-pop, they quickly gained a loyal fanbase; their output and visual focus have given their music videos viewing figures that rival those of PSY, BTS and BLACKPINK. They quickly grew their following beyond Korea's shores, being the first K-pop girl group to embark on a Japanese dome tour in 2019, and followed this with a US tour in the same year and a deal with YouTube to create a docuseries about the group. More recently, they embarked on their Ready to Be World Tour, which saw shows across the US, South America and Europe. TWICE's ability to identify and exploit internet trends has given them the kind of international reach that such a strategy allows, and they are a key part of this era of K-pop growth.

Despite the popularity of K-pop in America, having been brought in with all the groups we've seen so far, the UK has been a more difficult market for artists to break into. Although various acts have begun to appear on UK charts and tour UK venues – many of them fourth-generation acts – one of the earliest to gain mainstream success in Britain is SEVENTEEN, a boy group with, you guessed it, 13 members. Okay, it's not the obvious number of members, but the name comes from 13 (members) + 3 (units – hip-hop, vocal and performance) + 1 (band). The group are known for self-producing, with all of the members getting involved in writing, producing and choreographing their songs, alongside their label's resident producers. This defining quality, along with the performance versatility of having such a large group – allowing them to storytell with performance unlike other groups – have been essential in their journey to stardom. From a low starting point, selling just 1,400 copies

Love it or hate it, PSY's 'Gangnam Style' opened the door for K-pop

Many K-pop groups will take part in competitions, such as this one from the TV station, SBS

BLACKPINK were the first female K-pop group to take home a VMA, in 2020

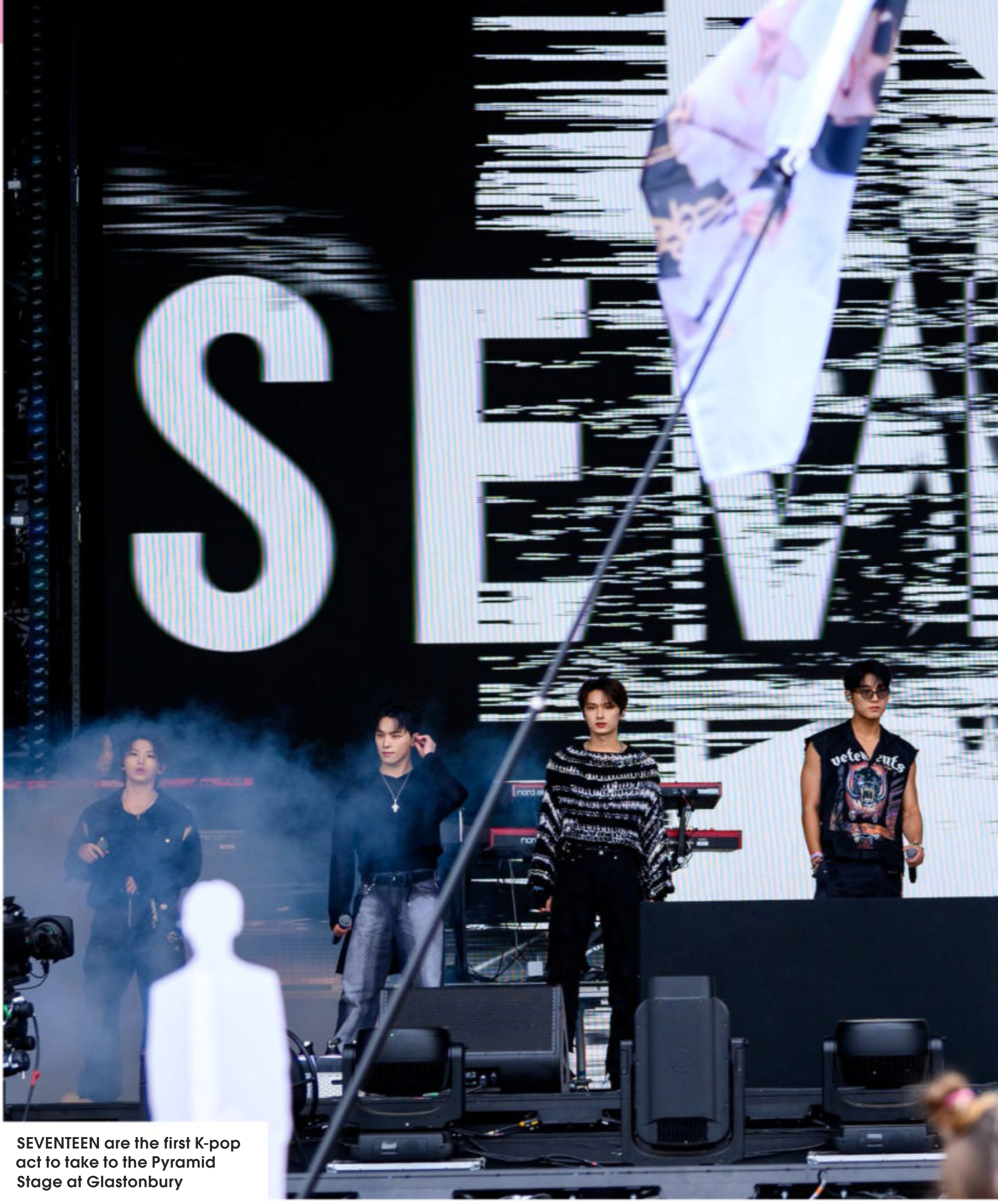
of their debut EP in its first week, they have grown and evolved as a group, with their music maturing into a distinctive style. In 2024, with three world tours behind them, each of which featured a run of shows in North America, and 10 million albums sold in the last year (second only to the powerhouse that is Taylor Swift), they made history when they took to the main stage at Glastonbury – the first K-pop act to ever do so.

This generation of K-pop artists truly stepped out of Korea and onto the world stage, which they took by storm according to any metric you can think of: from records broken and albums sold to stage shows performed and fans converted.

THE FOURTH GENERATION AND BEYOND

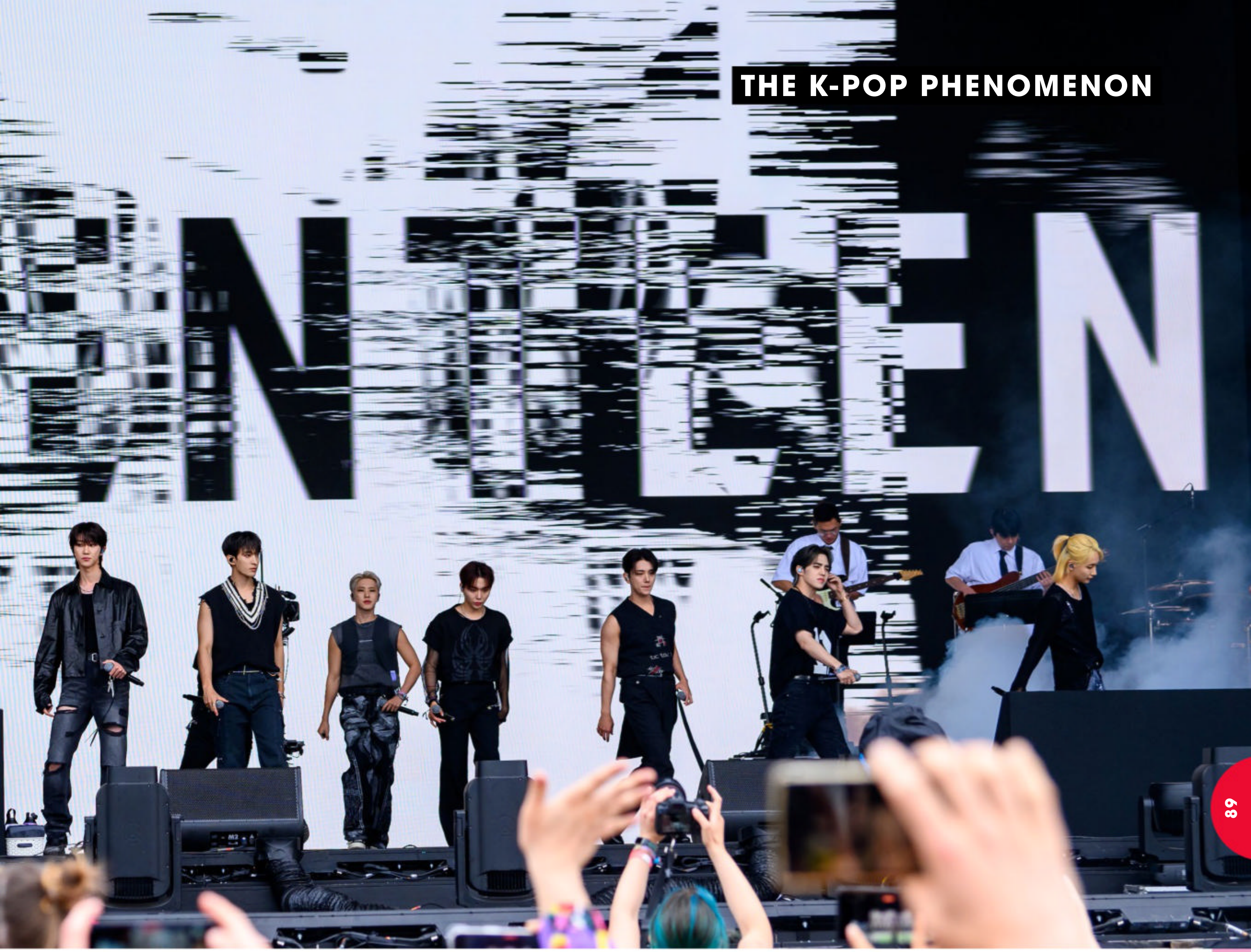
The successes of the third-generation K-pop acts such as BTS, BLACKPINK, TWICE and SEVENTEEN showed that not only was there a pathway for Korean acts to penetrate the Western market, but that there were many different ways of doing it. To agencies and artists alike it was evident that they could become globally successful, and for fans in the West, these groups had shown that there was an appetite and willingness to come and play shows in their area: being a Western K-pop fan did not mean giving up the chance to see your favourites live. All these factors combined to create a powerful industry, where new acts could look beyond East Asia almost as soon as they had debuted.

ATEEZ, a boy group who debuted in 2018, took after BTS in being from a label outside the Big Three – a rarity for big fourth-generation groups – and wasted no time gaining ground in the US, with their debut EP, *TREASURE EP.1: All to Zero*, hitting number



SEVENTEEN are the first K-pop act to take to the Pyramid Stage at Glastonbury

ATEEZ found global success early in their career



> **"A PHENOMENON THAT IS BOTH A CAUSE AND SYMPTOM OF K-POP'S POPULARITY IN THE WEST IS K-POP ARTISTS' COLLABORATIONS WITH WESTERN ARTISTS"**

12 on the Billboard World Albums chart. They soon embarked on an early world tour that sold out all the dates in the USA and Europe. Their international appeal was obvious from their earliest days, and actually arrived more quickly than domestic success, something that highlighted how big the K-pop market in the West was becoming.

Another fourth-generation group who have recently become a familiar sight in the UK are Stray Kids. The eight-piece group have gained support through a combination of consistent and authentic fan engagement, largely self-produced music with a genuinely distinctive sound, and consistently impressive live performances. There now seem to be few impediments to K-pop acts becoming global stars, and fifth-generation groups are quickly becoming more prominent, with girl group NewJeans at the forefront. Their catchy songs and Gen-Z aesthetic have tapped into the social media zeitgeist in an impressively orchestrated campaign that's shot them to the top of the Western music industry, competing for awards and chart places with titans like Taylor Swift, Ed Sheeran and The Weeknd.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATION

A phenomenon that is both a cause and symptom of K-pop's popularity in the West is K-pop artists' collaborations with Western artists. The popularity of bands such as BTS, BLACKPINK and SEVENTEEN beyond Korea has often come about due to hard work, clever branding, unique concepts and authentic fan interaction. This has made them big enough names that major Western stars have spotted an opportunity. Collaborating with a group that has a dedicated core fanbase, a presence in previously untapped markets – particularly in East Asia – and is on the way up can be a boon for everyone involved. It also gives the K-pop artists added recognition of an already-famous name and brand that brings their music to a new audience, helping them to widen their appeal and, in a broader sense, raise the profile of K-pop as a whole. Numerous K-pop artists have pursued this course, and although BTS are far from the first to do so, their catalogue of collaborations is impressive, with the likes of Halsey, Coldplay, Charli XCX, Nicki Minaj and Megan Thee Stallion all featuring. BLACKPINK have been no slouches here either, with a constellation of pop's biggest names combining their talents with the girls', from Dua Lipa and Lady Gaga to Cardi B and Selena Gomez. Some Western artists seem to have a particular love for K-pop, working

BTS teamed up with Lil Nas X at the 2020 Grammys

with various groups. Megan Thee Stallion, for instance, has worked with TWICE as well as BTS, and Steve Aoki has worked with BTS, Monsta X and (G)I-DLE.

It's a common move for K-pop artists looking to grow their solo careers, too, with stars from some of the biggest groups bringing in Western artists on their tracks. From BLACKPINK's Rosé working with Bruno Mars, LE SSERAFIM's Huh Yunjin with MAX and Red Velvet's Wendy with John Legend, to BTS's RM working with Lil Nas X and Taeyeon with Sam Smith, solo collabs are big business.

K-pop fans are renowned for their passion and devotion to their idols

The proliferation of these collaborations shows the commercial appeal of K-pop artists in the Western music industry, a trend that truly underscores the extent of the genre's international appeal.

FANDOM CULTURE

Perhaps the defining feature of K-pop, which spans so many genres and artists, is fandoms. There are few online communities that can match the sheer passion, scope and influence of K-pop fandoms. The primary landscape for K-pop fans is social media (in 2021, such was its importance, Twitter set up a specialist team to deal with K-pop fans on the platform), where millions of K-pop fanatics across the world can come together. The importance of fan engagement is not lost on K-pop artists, with regular fan meets, live vlogs and other events a very common part of the calendar of the biggest artists, and this aspect has been key to the growth of some of the genre's most famous acts. Fans are not just consumers, though, they are creators too. This side of the sub-culture is hugely influential, as fans create edits of their biases (favourite members), make particular clips of songs or dances go viral, and translate songs into English – this has been a major factor in the globalisation of K-pop, as it has made lyrics more accessible to non-Korean speakers.

Individual groups will generally have a dedicated fandom, often given a name under which they can come together: BTS have ARMYs, BLACKPINK have BLINKs, ATEEZ have ATINYs (a contraction of ATEEZ and destiny) and Stray Kids have STAYs ('you make Stray Kids Stay'). The force of these mostly online, mostly young fandoms is intense: they have, among other things, coined new words and popularised others; in 2021, 26 Korean words were added to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) due to their common use online, and, back in 2016, ARMYs made the word 'purple' synonymous for 'love' after using the purple heart emoji extensively. Even big brands' social media accounts jumped on the trend, hoping to tap into the commercial wellspring.

Such is the purchasing power of K-pop fans, they have almost single-handedly revived the market for physical media (Swifties notwithstanding!). In 2023, 29 separate albums sold more than 1 million physical copies in their first week, and albums are routinely released in multiple versions to enable fans to buy versions with extra tracks or that are themed around a member.

LE SSERAFIM at Coachella – one of many K-pop groups to have appeared at the festival

The magic of K-pop has reached a global audience

Stray Kids are everywhere, all around the world

TAKING THE STAGE

There are different milestones that show a musician's growing success in a new market. From simply having some fans and selling some records to attracting crowds and selling out ever-bigger venues, K-pop artists have often had to grind away before hitting the highs of chart-topping albums and songs, big-name collaborations and spots at some of the West's most high-profile festivals. In recent years, though, seeing K-pop artists not only on the bill for big festivals but often even headlining them has become more and more common in both the US and UK.

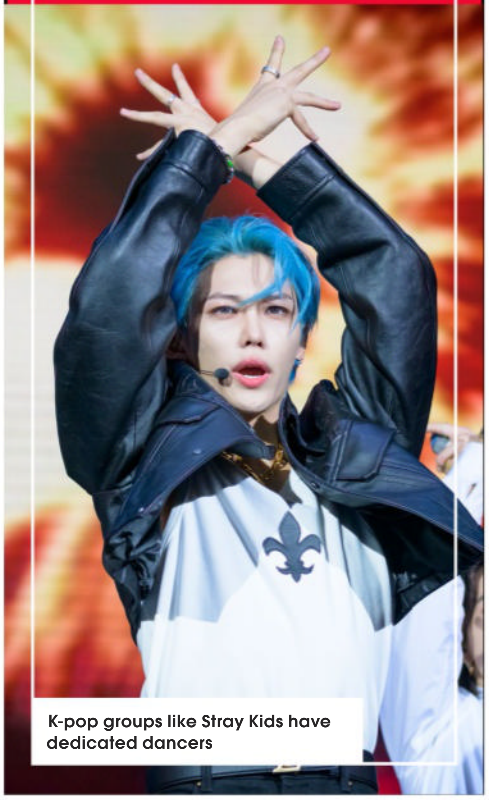
Coachella saw BLACKPINK take the stage for the first time in 2019, with 2NE1 – a pioneering second-generation K-pop group – agreeing to reunite to perform the following year at the festival, joined on the bill by fourth-generation girl group aespa. BLACKPINK returned in 2023 to make history as the first K-pop group to headline the festival, and in 2024, both ATEEZ and LE SSERAFIM were added to its illustrious list of Korean superstars.

Lollapalooza, the famed US festival, is another that has truly embraced K-pop in recent times, with a range of Korean acts gracing its turf. BTS's j-hope broke new ground when he headlined the festival in 2022 – the first Korean artist to headline a US festival main stage – and the festival has since played host to other K-pop stars including TOMORROW X TOGETHER, Stray Kids and the fifth-generation phenomenon, NewJeans. While slower to embrace K-pop than the US, UK festivals are also starting to see more K-pop presence, with BLACKPINK marking their place in history as the first Korean artist to headline a major UK festival in 2023 and SEVENTEEN becoming the first K-pop act to appear on the main stage at Glastonbury. At last, K-pop has fully arrived on UK shores.

MORE THAN MUSIC

K-pop is not just about vocals, it's about putting on a show

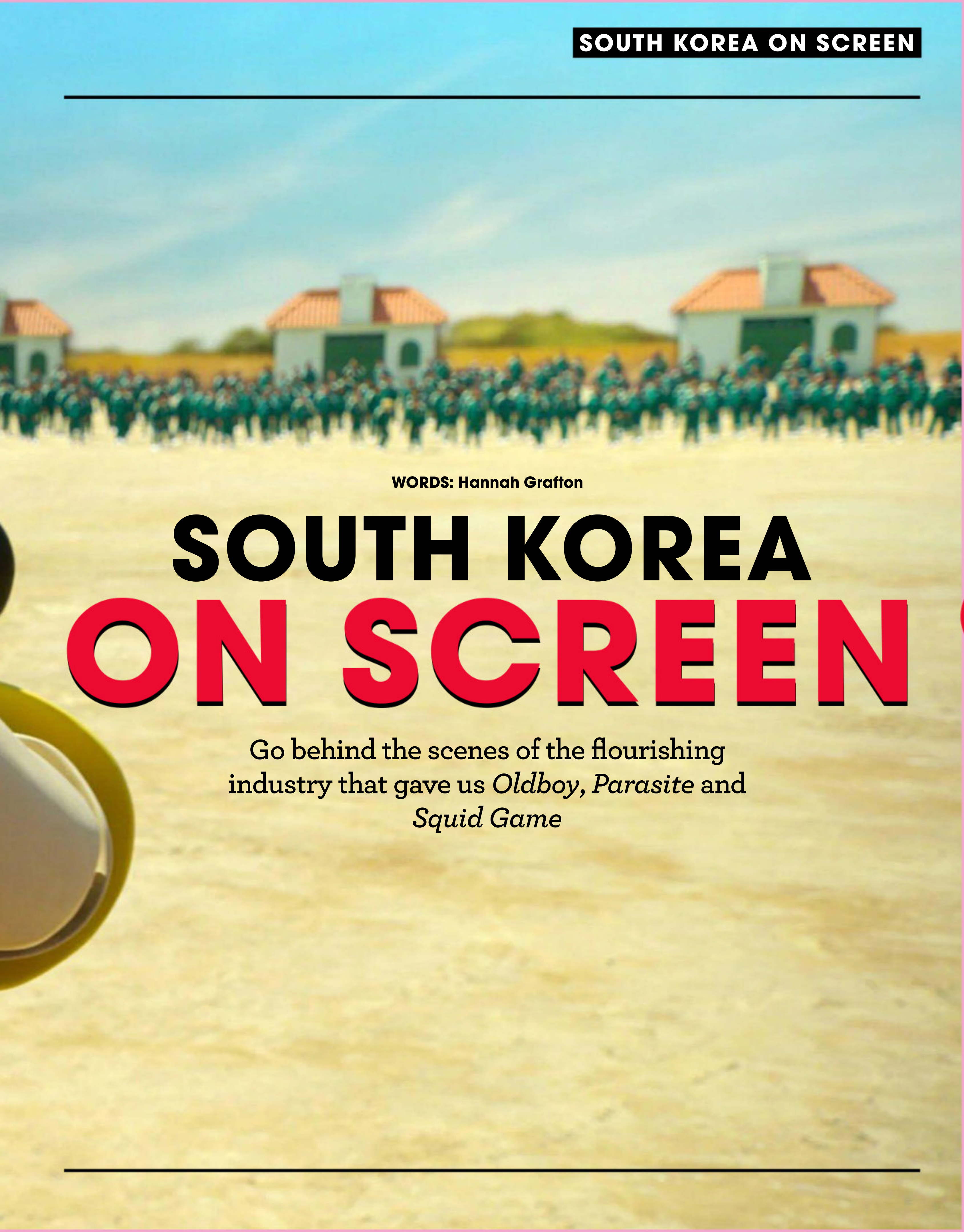
While in the West dance is now seen as a peripheral part of a musical act, in K-pop it is a central pillar of the genre. Since the end of the 90s/00s boyband era, when synchronised choreography was the order of the day, the dance side of Western performances has lessened. K-pop's focus on choreography, on the other hand, has seen shows become hugely popular as visual spectacles, with perfectly-timed moves as important to the show as the vocals. Offstage, too, choreography is of the utmost importance. One of the most vital social media vessels for K-pop promotion is the dance challenge, where members of different groups attempt the moves from another act's song. These short clips often go viral and offer an important low-key collaboration that enables fans to discover new groups and the groups to reach new fans. So important is choreography to K-pop that many groups have a dedicated dance unit (ie some of the members specialise as primarily dancers rather than singers or rappers), considered just as necessary as vocal or rap units.



K-pop groups like Stray Kids have dedicated dancers

Image source: Alamy; Getty Images

The visuals of *Squid Game* is just as iconic as the story



WORDS: Hannah Grafton

SOUTH KOREA ON SCREEN

Go behind the scenes of the flourishing industry that gave us *Oldboy*, *Parasite* and *Squid Game*

South Korea's history of Japanese occupation, post-war economic struggle, and later rapid growth have given its entertainment industry a fearlessness in exploring heavy subjects and complex emotions. Korean films and television shows usually revolve around the human experience, the forgotten parts of society, or intricate family dynamics, underscored by the country's long standing Confucian values. Korean directors and writers are adept at genre-bending, weaving together themes of romance, drama, horror, and action. With well-crafted narratives and shocking twists keeping viewers on the edge of their seat, the film and television industries have garnered critical and international audience acclaim. But it's been far from plain sailing.

THE POST-WAR GOLDEN AGE

During the Korean War, the film industry understandably stagnated. In the years following, filmmakers had to contend with government censorship, producing films that were considered to be loyal to the government. Despite this roadblock, 1955-72 is considered South Korea's golden age of cinema, with directors and writers taking inspiration from their experiences of the war period and Japanese occupation.

Some of the most popular films of the golden age were Lee Gyu-Hwan's remake of popular love story, *Chunhyangjeon* (1955), which was seen by ten per cent of Seoul's population, and Kim Ki-young's domestic drama *The Housemaid* (1960), which saw a manipulative maid seduce her master in a gender power swap that became distinctive of Kim's films. Another popular filmmaker of the era was Yu Hyun-mok, whose film *Obaltan* (1961) commented on the destruction of the war with heavily-stylised sound and visuals.

> **"WITH WELL-CRAFTED NARRATIVES AND TWISTS KEEPING VIEWERS ON THE EDGE OF THEIR SEAT, THE FILM AND TELEVISION INDUSTRIES HAVE GARNERED CRITICAL AND INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCE ACCLAIM"**

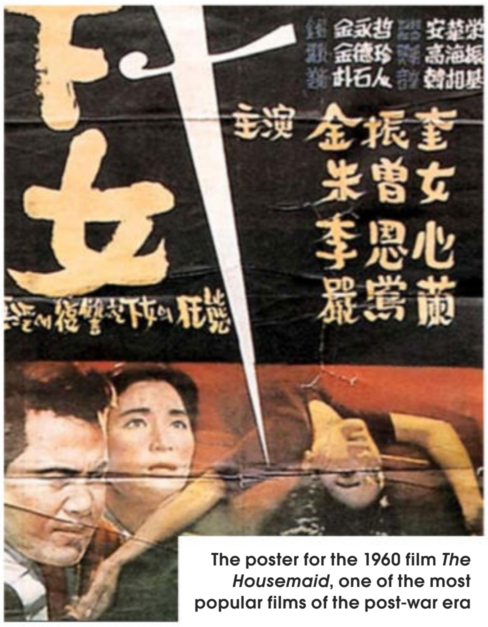
Meanwhile, the television industry was seeing impressive growth as well. Despite also struggling under the censorship of the government, Korea managed to set up its first broadcasting station in 1956 and debuted its first drama, *The Gates of Heaven*, that same year. In the 1960s, Korean stations KBS and TBC were set up and started airing melodramas – which today are known to the rest of the world as 'K-dramas'.

TELEVISION TAKES OFF

The number of television sets in Korea grew from 4 million in 1979 to 6 million in 1989, and, in the same period, broadcasting stations increased from 12 to 78. When colour television was officially introduced in 1980, Korean television's golden age began. Despite being censored by the government until 1987, historical and romance dramas flourished, including the sweeping historical series *500 Years of Joseon* (1983-90), directed by Lee Byung-hoon, who became one of the most well-known names in Korean television. Screenwriter Kim Soo-hyun also emerged in the 1980s, and is now one of Korea's most renowned screenwriters for her stories of family life and the female experience. Her shows were so widely loved that the streets were said to turn quiet at the airing time of her drama *Love and Ambition* (1987), as the entire country tuned in!

As the government started to remove restrictions on the film industry in the 1980s,

Oldboy (2003) was one of the first South Korean blockbusters to see worldwide success



The poster for the 1960 film *The Housemaid*, one of the most popular films of the post-war era

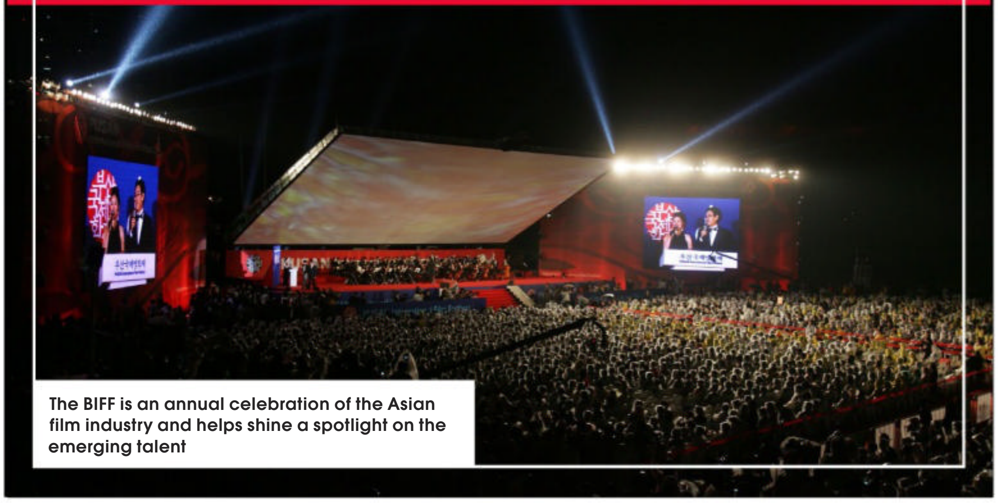
Han Suk-kyu (L) and Choi Min-sik (R) in a scene from action thriller *Shiri*, one of the first films of Hallyu

BUSAN BECOMES A FILM LANDMARK

How South Korea's favourite seaside destination became the heart of the film industry

Every autumn, Busan, South Korea's second-largest city, welcomes the biggest names in the film industry for the Busan International Film Festival (BIFF). Founded in 1996, the festival was the first international film festival to be held in Korea, and has grown to become one of the most prestigious film events in Asia.

BIFF is focused on new films and first-time directors, particularly those from Asian countries, giving up-and-coming filmmakers a chance to make their mark. The festival has established Busan as a hub of culture and art, and the city has even built its own take on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, featuring the handprints of Korea's biggest film stars.



The BIFF is an annual celebration of the Asian film industry and helps shine a spotlight on the emerging talent

more films were imported into Korea and simultaneously, Korean films could now reach global audiences. Director Im Kwon-taek's *Mandala* (1981), a film exploring Buddhism in Korean society, won the Grand Prix at the 1981 Hawaii Film Festival, and remains as the most highly-regarded in his 100-film-strong career. With censorship relaxing, Korean writers and directors could now start to experiment with their topics and genres. This included Park Kwang-Su's *Chilsu and Mansu* (1988), which uses imagery reminiscent of a street protest in its final scene. *Chilsu and Mansu* was not a box office hit, but is remembered as a breakthrough for freedom of expression in Korean film.

THE BIRTH OF THE BLOCKBUSTER

In the 1990s, a number of influential writer-directors came on the scene, including Park Chan-wook, Kim Ki-duk, Hong Sang-soo, and Lee Chang-dong. Their arrival heralded the era of 'New Korean Cinema', which saw glossy blockbusters and more stylised films hitting cinemas. One of the first was Kang Je-gyu's *Shiri* (1999), which told the story of a North Korean assassin in Seoul. Selling more than 2 million tickets in Seoul alone, *Shiri* was also a commercial success in Hong Kong and Japan, making it one of the first films of Hallyu, aka the Korean Wave.

This was followed by a number of films seeing phenomenal success across Asia, including Park Chan-wook's mystery-thriller

Joint Security Area (2000); Kwak Jae-young's romantic comedy *My Sassy Girl* (2001), which was the subject of multiple foreign remakes; and Kang Je-gyu's war film *Taegukgi* (2004), which was seen by a quarter of South Korea's population. The buzz reached the Western world when Park Chan-wook's thriller *Oldboy* (2003) won the Grand Prix at the 2004 Cannes Film Festival, and director Bong Joon Ho's horror *The Host* (2006) was praised by film critics around the world.

In the 2000s, several K-dramas also began achieving popularity worldwide during the ongoing Korean Wave. *Jewel in the Palace* (2003-4) was extremely popular in Chinese-speaking countries and was exported to 80 countries. Melodrama *Winter Sonata* (2002) also achieved a cult following among women in Japan for its star actor, Bae Yong-joon. Actresses Kim Tae-hee, Song Hye-kyo, and Jun ji-hyun, known collectively as 'Tae-Hye-Ji', starred in many K-dramas and films of the Hallyu era, garnering pan-Asian popularity.

Global audiences developed a taste for Korean cinema in the 2010s, and several of the country's most successful films followed, including Bong Joon Ho's English-language film *Snowpiercer* (2013); Yeon Sang-ho's zombie thriller *Train to Busan* (2016); Park Chan-wook's historical thriller *The Handmaiden* (2016); and, of course, Bong Joon Ho's *Parasite* (2019). A black comedy that tells the story of a poor family who infiltrate the life of a wealthy family, *Parasite* became the first South Korean film to win the prestigious Palm d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival, as well as the first film not in English to win the Academy Award for Best Picture, raising the profile of Korean cinema to new heights.

After a gradual rise in popularity, the COVID-19 pandemic saw a boom in the viewership for K-dramas as audiences sought escapism through their screens. Reality shows like *Single's Inferno* (2021-) and dramas like *Crash Landing on You* (2019), *Itaewon Class* (2020), and the smash hit *Squid Game* (2021-) attracted viewers from around the world, and today, a new generation of stars is emerging, spearheaded by performers like Gong Yoo, Park Seo Joon, Kim Go-Eun, Kim Tae-ri, and Byeon Woo-seok.

> **"AFTER A GRADUAL RISE IN POPULARITY, THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC SAW A BOOM IN THE VIEWERSHIP FOR K-DRAMAS AS AUDIENCES SOUGHT ESCAPISM"**

THE BEST OF THE BEST

While movie-goers in the Western world prefer Korea's darker thrillers like *Parasite* and *Oldboy*, most of Korea's highest-grossing films are fantasy, sageuk (historical drama), and comedy. These include *The Admiral: Roaring Currents* (2014), *Extreme Job* (2019), and *Ode to My Father* (2014). Aeni (animation), horror, and Zainchini (films that focus on the Korean diaspora, usually around the period of Japanese occupation) are also popular genres in the film industry.

K-dramas have a number of sub-genres including action, medical, legal, horror, and thriller, although all of the highest rated shows of the past few years have fit under the romance, comedy, and historical genres. These include *SKY Castle* (2018), *Queen of Tears* (2024), *Crash Landing on You* (2019), *Mr. Sunshine* (2018), and *Extraordinary Attorney Woo* (2022). Many modern-day K-dramas also showcase ongoing Korean societal issues, such as bullying, gender inequality, mental health stigma, and classism.

MAKING A K-DRAMA

The television production process in Korea works a little differently. K-dramas usually have a single writer and a single director (this might even be the same person), meaning each drama has a distinct style that viewers can recognise, and writers can have just as many loyal fans as the shows' stars. The first few episodes of a K-drama are filmed in advance, but the rest are shot continuously as the show is airing. This saves on production expenses and means writers can change the script based on audience feedback, editing plotlines to match viewer expectations. Naturally, this creates a very intense shooting process, where actors, crew, and editors get very little time to sleep and eat. However, some shows are moving to the pre-produced format, since the rise in global popularity of K-dramas has enabled producers to sell the rights to their shows ahead of time.

Music also plays a much bigger role in the production of Korean television than in other

Actress Kim Min-jung in a scene for the historical romance melodrama *Mr. Sunshine*

Parasite has not only won worldwide acclaim, it has also won countless awards, including four Oscars

THE BEST OF KOREAN FILM AND TV

Our recommendations for your next watch – whatever mood you're in

The Host

ROMANCE

MY SASSY GIRL (2001)

Unlucky-in-love Gyeon-woo finds himself looking after a mysterious girl.

DRAMA

DESCENDANTS OF THE SUN (2016)

A love story between a South Korean Special Forces soldier and a surgeon.

Empress Ki

THRILLER/COMEDY

PARASITE (2019)

This black comedy-thriller tells an important story of social mobility and class.

DRAMA

SKY CASTLE (2018)

A gripping show exploring the lengths that wealthy housewives will go to for their children.

HORROR

THE HOST (2006)

The story of a mysterious monster that is dwelling in Seoul's Hangang River.

DRAMA

ALL OF US ARE DEAD (2022)

A class of high-school students do their best to survive a zombie outbreak.

HISTORICAL

THE ADMIRAL: ROARING CURRENTS (2014)

This epic war drama follows a naval commander during the Battle of Myeongnyang.

DRAMA

EMPRESS KI (2013)

Follow the story of Ki Seung-nyang as she ascends to power in China's Yuan Dynasty.

Extreme Job

COMEDY

EXTREME JOB (2019)

A team of detectives have to go undercover in a fried chicken shop.

ROMANCE

CRASH LANDING ON YOU (2019)

A South Korean woman blows off course while paragliding, landing in North Korea.

With *Parasite* catching the attention of a worldwide audience, Korean entertainment reached a whole new level

> “THE EXPORT VALUE OF SOUTH KOREAN TELEVISION IS NOW HIGHER THAN THAT OF BATTERIES OR ELECTRIC VEHICLES”

countries. Original soundtracks (OSTs) are made specifically for each series, designed to reflect the storyline and emotions. Often performed by K-pop soloists or groups, these OSTs become hits of their own, with fans flocking to buy the soundtracks of their favourite shows.

CHANGING CHANNELS

Until a few years ago, Korean television networks like KBS, MBC, SBS, and EBS were the only platforms to watch K-dramas. But the advent of streaming has changed the game, and now production companies are creating series for platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Disney+. What's more, in addition to releasing shows on their platforms, enabling audiences from around the world to binge their favourite K-dramas, the biggest names in streaming are also creating and funding their own shows. Netflix saw huge success in the release of its show *Squid Game* and in 2023, the company announced it would invest $2.5 billion in Korean content.

HOW FILM AND TV HAS SHAPED KOREA

The Korean government has funnelled investment into the entertainment industry with the goal of dominating the market and promoting Korean culture worldwide. And it's worked – the export value of Korean television is now higher than batteries or electric vehicles, more tourists are travelling to Korea to visit film and drama locations, and thriving fan communities have become platforms for cultural exchange. Korean directors, writers, and actors are becoming household names beyond just their home country, and the films and dramas they create are known for their high-quality narratives and visuals.

As the global influence of Korean films and television dramas grows, audiences are anticipating more international collaborations – Korean creators joining forces with international filmmakers to increase the visibility of their art and explore new genres, cultures, and perspectives. From heavy censorship to one of the world's leading entertainment industries in just a few decades, Korean film and television continues to be fearless when it comes to storytelling.

Image source: Alamy; Getty Images

Skincare is a ritualised part of daily life for many Korean people

WORDS: Hannah Grafton

GET THE K-BEAUTY GLOW

We explore how South Korea's skincare and cosmetics industry has become a powerful global trendsetter

Just like their electronics, telecommunications and car production, South Korea's beauty industry has cultivated a reputation for high quality and innovation. Beauty fanatics see a product being Korean-made as a badge of authenticity, trusting that it will deliver faster results at a better price than high-end Western brands. In the third quarter of 2024 alone, $7.4 billion of K-beauty products were exported, an increase of almost 20 per cent in just a year. The industry is clearly growing fast, and Korean brands like LANEIGE, innisfree, Sulwhasoo, COSRX, and Dr.Jart+ have been propelled into the spotlight, as well as to the top of our social media feeds.

Many Koreans embrace a multi-step beauty routine

THE GOLD BEAUTY STANDARD

Much of the Korean beauty industry is designed to help consumers meet the country's unique beauty standards. For women, beauty ideals include having a small, v-shaped face, a fair complexion, round eyes with double eyelids, and flawless, glowing skin. Overall, Korean women prefer a young and innocent look, and strive for hyper-femininity. Korean celebrities are the ones expected to embody this standard the most, with celebrities like IU and Jennie Kim of BLACKPINK held up as the gold standard of Korean beauty. Body shape is, of course, considered too, with many women aspiring to achieve a slim and toned figure, which is contrary to the idealised curves of Western beauty.

And the beauty standard isn't limited to women. Men's ideals follow the same guidelines, dictating fair skin, a high nose, a small chin, muscular build, and – unlike in Western cultures – no facial hair. A huge contributor to Korean beauty standards is the K-pop industry, with male and female idols constantly popping up on TV, billboards, beauty products, and even the windows of coffee shops to remind the public of the idealised aesthetic. This has led to a softer beauty standard for Korean men, who are no stranger to makeup and skincare. Korean cosmetics brands innisfree and TONYMOLY have even popularised warpaint with skincare benefits for men serving their mandatory military service.

> "MUCH OF THE KOREAN BEAUTY INDUSTRY IS DESIGNED TO HELP CONSUMERS MEET THE COUNTRY'S UNIQUE BEAUTY STANDARDS"

But the Korean beauty standard didn't appear out of nowhere – it stems from centuries of beliefs and historical preferences. Koreans during the Joseon Dynasty were said to be influenced by Confucian philosophies like modesty, purity, and the value of nature, which might be where the preference for pale, clear skin and dark hair comes from. Plus, fair skin was a class identifier, with a tan being associated with people who spent time outside doing manual labour.

THE PUSH FOR PERFECTION

As is the case around the world, deviating from localised beauty ideals can impact self-esteem, mental health, and cause feelings of inferiority or isolation. And the negative effects of not meeting the stringent beauty standard go beyond Koreans' personal lives – it can also affect them professionally. Korea has a highly-competitive job market, and candidates can be asked to include a picture of themselves or to give their height and weight in their applications.

Progress has started in the form of a blossoming body positivity movement and social media activism, and several celebrities have spoken up to advocate for more inclusive representations of beauty. But in a culture where beauty ideals are so homogenised, there's still a long road ahead.

BLACKPINK's Jennie Kim is often held up as the Korean beauty standard for women

Still, the enduring beauty standard has motivated many Korean people (primarily women) to seek out cosmetic procedures – around a quarter of Korean women between 19-29 and a third between 30-39 have undergone some form of cosmetic surgery. One district of Seoul – Gangnam – has even been dubbed the 'Beauty Belt' due to its saturation of clinics and hospitals. Some of the most common surgeries that Koreans undergo include blepharoplasty (a procedure that creates upper eyelids with a crease), lip filler, jaw or chin reduction, and liposuction.

While there remains some stigma when it comes to cosmetic surgery, it's not as taboo as in Western countries, so it's not unusual to see people walking the streets of Seoul with bandaged faces, or even receiving surgery as a gift. Given its popularity in Korea, the country has built a reputation for innovative cosmetic procedures and quality, safe surgeons, which has attracted beauty-conscious visitors from around the world. This medical tourism is very much encouraged by the government, who have set a goal of attracting 700,000 medical tourists by 2027.

> "GIVEN ITS POPULARITY, KOREA HAS BUILT A REPUTATION FOR INNOVATIVE COSMETIC PROCEDURES AND QUALITY, SAFE SURGEONS"

THE K-BEAUTY PHENOMENON

The Korean beauty industry has exploded over the past few years. In 2024 it held the position of the tenth largest beauty market in the world, and is a powerful industry trendsetter. Despite its appeal around the world, Korean skincare and cosmetics differ greatly from their Western counterparts. Firsty, Korean consumers have very different beauty consumption habits. In Korea, it's not uncommon to use up to ten or 15 products on a daily basis (hence the viral 'ten-step skincare routine' popularised on social media, but more on that to follow). Using more products on a daily basis might sound daunting, but it shows just how much Korean customers enjoy the ritualistic aspect of self-care within their busy lives. Western consumers, on the other hand, tend to look for products that will speed up and simplify their beauty routines, and while Westerners prefer to stay loyal to the brands they love, Koreans regularly switch it up and try trending products.

Another defining principle of K-beauty is its focus on prevention, rather than reversal. Whether it's wrinkles, dark spots, or acne, Koreans want to fix underlying skin problems rather than simply covering them with makeup. K-beauty also uses different ingredients that set it apart. While there are a lot of scientifically-developed ingredients in Western skincare (think retinol, glycolic acid, and niacinamide), Korean skincare

innisfree
龍城
DRAGON CITY
Korean beauty brands, such as innisfree, use every opportunity to promote their products

MASTER THE KOREAN SKINCARE ROUTINE

Refresh your daily beauty process with the viral Korean ten-step facial skincare routine

In the past few years, we've seen ten, 15 and even 18-step Korean skincare routines go viral on social media. Realistically, most Koreans switch up their routines depending on what their skin needs – so it might be more like a six or seven-step routine on average – but these actions can be the basis of your perfect skin schedule.

OIL-BASED CLEANSER

The first step of double cleansing, an oil or balm cleanser will dissolve any makeup, oil, or sunscreen on your skin.

WATER-BASED CLEANSER

The second step of the double cleanse, this gently removes water-based impurities like sweat and dirt.

EXFOLIATOR

This removes dead skin cells and clears your pores. Depending on the exfoliator's strength, start by using it once every few days and build it up slowly.

TONER

This hydrates your skin, rebalances your skin's pH level, and removes remaining impurities for the rest of your routine.

ESSENCE

These lightweight, water-based treatments contain active ingredients that are chosen to address any specific skin concerns you have.

SERUM

Similar to essence, serums and ampoules are more concentrated and address things like wrinkles, hyperpigmentation, or dryness.

FACE MASK

Wash-off masks help to clean or exfoliate your skin, while sheet masks will replenish your skin's nutrients and moisture.

EYE CREAM

Whether in cream or patch form, eye care helps brighten dark circles with gentler ingredients for the sensitive eye skin.

MOISTURISER

Moisturisers can be cream, lotion, gel, or oil, helping lock in your routine and preventing moisture from leaving the skin.

SPF

Used year-round, an SPF should always follow your moisturiser in the morning to prevent sunburn, premature ageing, and decrease the risk of skin cancer.

tends to favour natural ingredients like ginseng, centella asiatica, and green tea.

In the pursuit of more natural ingredients, K-beauty brands have developed some of the most talked-about products on social media, including face masks made from snail mucin, moisturiser containing PDRN (salmon sperm), and exfoliating serums using spicules (needle-like structures derived from sea sponges).

Of course, the differences don't end with skincare, and despite using the same basic makeup products such as eyeliner, eyeshadow, blusher, and mascara, the average Korean makeup routine has a few key differences. One of the most obvious differences is 'aegyosal', aka the small lines of skin that sit under the eyes. Koreans believe that this eye fat creates a more youthful-looking face, so many makeup lovers will use eyeshadow and highlighter, or even dedicated 'aegyosal makers', to mimic this feature.

With many Koreans preferring fair skin, in contrast to the tanned look coveted in Western countries, Korean makeup routines bypass bronzer in favour of products that are made to brighten and whiten their complexion. Products with bioactive ingredients and dermaceutical (the merging of skincare and makeup) benefits like skin regeneration and whitening are therefore in very high demand, and SPF is seen as the most important part of the Korean daily skincare routine.

Another differing feature is coloured contact lenses. Most Koreans naturally have very dark eyes, and, to make them look more youthful, prefer them to look wider and more doll-like. Entire brands like OLENS (which has a store on most shopping streets in Seoul) have been built around fashion contact lenses that are designed to blend with darker eyes, offering subtle colour changes that add dimension.

K-BEAUTY AS A TRENDING TOPIC

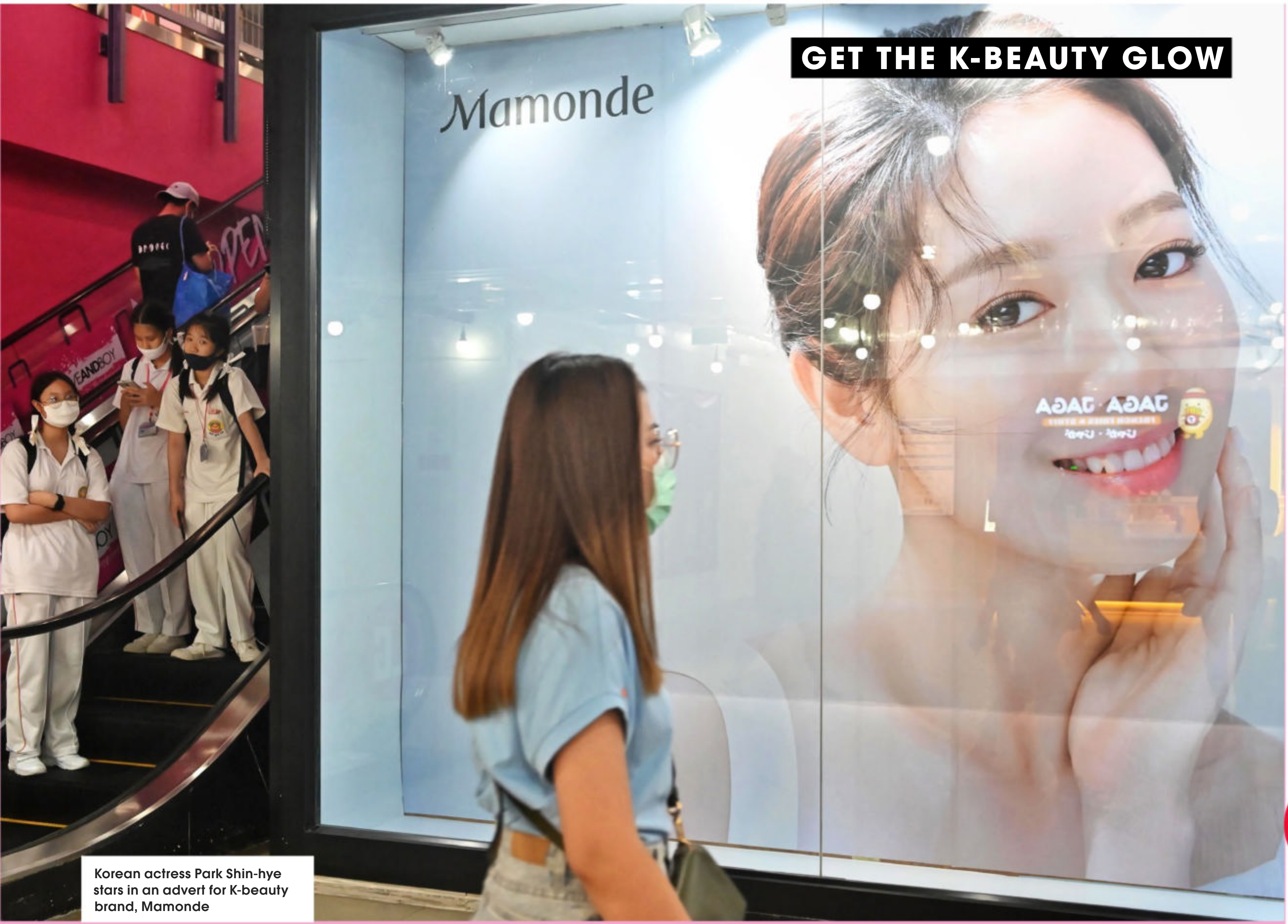
Just like K-pop and K-drama, K-beauty has caught the attention of people across the globe, adding another element to the growth of Hallyu. Today, just using the terms 'Korean skincare' or 'K-beauty' can attract thousands of social media users looking for the latest beauty trends, and the hashtag #Kbeauty has been used millions of times on Instagram and TikTok. With young people increasingly turning to these apps to research and share their daily beauty routines, we've seen the rise of trends like the Korean 'glass skin' look, 'mirror skin',

WARM
COOL
OLIVE YOUNG

Olive Young is the biggest beauty retailer in Korea, attracting shoppers from overseas

SEVENTEEN
THE BEST
17
IS RIGHT HERE

Male K-pop idols like SEVENTEEN have changed the beauty standard for men



Korean actress Park Shin-hye stars in an advert for K-beauty brand, Mamonde

> “USING THE TERMS ‘KOREAN SKINCARE’ OR ‘K-BEAUTY’ CAN ATTRACT THOUSANDS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USERS LOOKING FOR THE LATEST BEAUTY TRENDS”

petroleum jelly ‘slugging’, and blurred lips. By hopping on these trends, and tapping into influencer marketing, Korean brands like LANEIGE and Beauty of Joseon have seen their products become industry favourites overnight.

Now, tourists are travelling to Korea not just to undergo cosmetic procedures, but also to get their hands on the latest Korean skincare and makeup. Many Korean brands manufacture their products in Korea, and given the highly-competitive nature of the industry, products are usually more affordable than buying overseas, appealing to international visitors.

FIRST KOREA, THEN THE WORLD

As global beauty trends evolve, K-beauty is turning its focus to accessibility. After Korean brand TIRTIR faced global backlash for stocking a limited range of skin tones for its cushion foundation, the brand took immediate action and expanded its shade range. As more brands are gaining popularity around the world, and platforms like TikTok Shop are making it easier for global consumers to access their products, Korean companies are making changes to ensure that customers of all skin tones feel represented in their products.

Skincare and makeup enthusiasts across every continent have been captivated by Korean beauty and its unique ingredients, almost overwhelming choice of brands, and focus on healthy, glowing skin. ‘K-beauty’ might be a trending topic, but the brands and products that have grown from the hype will be here to stay.

Global consumers are discovering K-beauty through social media platforms like TikTok

Image source: Alamy; Getty Images; Adobe Stock/ SHOTPRIME STUDIO

108

122

116

126

120

TRAVEL

108 Your Ultimate Guide to Seoul
116 Natural Wonders of South Korea
120 Naejangsan
122 Korean Holidays and Festivals
126 10 Must-See Sights in South Korea

WORDS: Hannah Grafton

YOUR ULTIMATE GUIDE TO SEOUL

South Korea's capital shows the world how culture flourishes when tradition meets modernity

One of the largest cities in Asia and a hub for entertainment, technology and creativity, Seoul is immediately recognisable for its valleys of high-rise buildings and neon-lit neighbourhoods, dotted with green peaks and split through the middle by the meandering Hangang River. The city dates back to 18 BCE, when it was built as the capital city of Baekje, one of the kingdoms that would eventually form Korea.

In the centuries since, the city has suffered extensive damage to its cultural heritage, first by the Japanese invasions of the late 1500s, and second by the battles of the Korean War, which saw the city changing hands between the northern and southern forces four times. Despite a turbulent history, Seoul has emerged from the destruction to become a major economic powerhouse and cultural hub. Over half of South Korea's population live in the Seoul Metropolitan Area, and visitors from around the world flock there for its sights, delicious food, and unique history. And as the Korean wave continues to take effect, Seoul is establishing itself as a must-visit pop culture destination.

LOTTE WORLD MALL

Seoul is a wonderful city to visit, where sleek skyscrapers sit alongside traditional markets

Spring is the best season to visit Seoul if you're looking for cherry blossom photoshoots

WHEN TO VISIT

Spring is the best time to enjoy Seoul's parks, palaces and markets since the weather is at its most mild. Plus, if you're travelling in the hopes of catching the elusive blooming of the cherry blossoms (which usually happens in April), March, April, and May are your best bet. Autumn also has some of South Korea's best weather, and visitors in October and November are able to admire the leaves as they turn from green to rich jewel tones.

Summer and winter are quieter seasons in Seoul, with tourists deterred by humid, rainy days in the summer and freezing temperatures in the winter. However, if you're looking for festivals, watersports, and cooling down with copious iced Americanos, summer might be ideal for you, and if soaking in hot springs and snowboarding in Seoul's ski resorts sounds like a perfect trip, a winter getaway awaits.

GETTING AROUND

Finding your way around a big city like Seoul can be daunting but thankfully, public transport is extremely efficient, easy to navigate, and clean. The subway system is colour-coded, with English announcements and maps available on most trains. Buses are slightly more complex, but easier to understand with the right navigation apps. Google Maps is restricted in South Korea (because of security concerns surrounding North Korea), so you'll need to download Korean apps like NAVER Map or KakaoMap to plan your routes.

> "VISITORS IN OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER ARE ABLE TO ADMIRE THE LEAVES AS THEY TURN FROM GREEN TO RICH JEWEL TONES"

The subway system in Seoul has English announcements and is colour-coded for ease of use

Seoul has many historical sites to explore, such as Huijeongdang Hall at Changdeokgung Palace

With the leaves changing colour, autumn is a beautiful time to visit

Admire elaborate decoration at Changdeokgung Palace

For train and bus travel, you can either buy single-ride tickets or, for better value for money, buy a Tmoney card at the airport or any convenience store. The top-up machines found at each station only take cash, so make sure you have some Korean won available to replenish your travel card. Taxis are also readily available, including Uber, and are a safe and reasonably-priced option if you're travelling late at night.

YOUR LANDMARK TO-DO LIST

A trip to Seoul wouldn't be complete without a visit to its grand palaces, Gyeongbokgung and Changdeokgung. Marvel at the pavilions, secret gardens, and colourful 'dancheong' patterns found on their roofs. Jongmyo Shrine, located just below Changdeokgung Palace, houses the spirit tablets of Joseon Dynasty royals, and just a short distance away is Bukchon Hanok Village, a residential area filled with picturesque narrow alleyways, wood columns, and tiled red roofs. After you've admired its 900 traditional hanok buildings, set about enjoying Bukchon's charming restaurants and tea houses.

Culture nerds can also check out some of Seoul's 115 museums, such as the National Museum of Korea; the Seoul Museum of Art; the National Folk Museum of Korea (which is located inside Gyeongbokgung Palace); the War Memorial of Korea; and

5 TOP TIPS FOR YOUR SEOUL TRIP

Prepare for your Seoul adventure and make the most of this vibrant city

GET A MAP APP

Forget Google Maps. Download NAVER Map or KakaoMap, as Google Maps is limited in South Korea and cannot calculate accurate routes.

PREPARE TO WALK

Walk where you can. Seoul is pretty walkable, so go on foot whenever it's possible and you're bound to find some hidden gems. But fair warning – you may encounter some hills!

MAKE SURE TO EXPLORE

Don't judge a book by its cover. Many cafes and restaurants are hidden below ground, above street level, or behind inconspicuous shop fronts, so try to explore off the beaten path.

LEARN SOME PHRASES

Don't expect Koreans to speak to you in English, particularly elderly people. Learning a few key phrases before you arrive will go a long way, and locals will appreciate your effort.

KEEP SOME CASH HANDY

Don't rely on Apple Pay when you're out and about, as contactless isn't offered everywhere, and you'll also need to use cash to top up your transport card at subway stations.

the National Hangeul Museum, which showcases the history of the Korean alphabet. And you don't need to visit museums to immerse yourself in Seoul's history – just walking around some of the city's industrial districts like Jongno, Seongsu, and Mullae Arts Village can feel like stepping back in time.

The iconic landmark of the Seoul skyline, Namsan Seoul Tower, aka N Seoul Tower, offers a 360-degree view of the entire city, and is a must-visit. If you want to get your heart pumping, there are multiple relaxed walking routes to the peak of the mountain where the Tower is located, or a cable car runs directly to the top from Myeongdong. If you'd rather stay on even ground, a stroll along the Cheonggyecheon Stream is an excellent way to get your steps in. The stream is over ten kilometres (6.2 miles) in length and flows through the Jongno District, offering a peaceful route through the area's skyscraper-lined streets. As well as a babbling stream, you can enjoy a vast river by visiting one of the many parks that line the Hangang River. Here you can ride bikes, try watersports, or just enjoy a ramen-fuelled picnic.

HITTING THE STREETS

Korea is passionate about street food, so make sure you carve out time for Seoul's bustling markets. Gwangjang Market is one of the oldest and largest in Korea,

> “YOU DON'T NEED MUSEUMS TO IMMERSE YOURSELF IN HISTORY – THE CITY'S INDUSTRIAL DISTRICTS FEEL LIKE YOU'RE STEPPING BACK IN TIME”

The promenade along Cheonggyecheon stream is a lovely place to soak in the atmosphere

YOUR SEOUL NEIGHBOURHOOD GUIDE

If time is limited, use this guide to decide which area of Seoul to concentrate on

Hongdae

HONGDAE

Located in the west of Seoul, Hongdae is one of the busiest and most vibrant areas of the city, making it a great place to stay if you're visiting for the first time. Home to a thriving music scene, plenty of street art and vintage clothing sellers, Hongdae is characterised by its maze of streets and lively nightlife.

Myeongdong

MYEONGDONG

Myeongdong is the most popular tourist area in Seoul, and has a number of great accommodation options for first-time visitors. Visitors and locals alike are drawn in by Myeongdong's neon lights, street food, and cut-price skincare and souvenir shopping.

JONGNO

Jongno is home to Seoul's most popular palaces, so you're bound to spend some time visiting this bustling district! Between the two palaces is Bukchon Hanok Village and the Insadong area, lined with traditional buildings that make you feel as though you've stepped right into a period K-drama.

Jongno

ITAEWON

Equally as famous for its nightlife as Hongdae, Itaewon is known for its bars and restaurants offering global cuisine and music. A lot of expats frequent this area, and the main street of Itaewon is a great place for club hopping, karaoke, and sports bars. Head north from Itaewon and you'll find Haebangchon, a hidden gem on the slopes of Namsan mountain. With buzzing Shinheung Market and many cafes offering a panoramic view of sunset over Seoul, Haebangchon is the perfect evening destination.

Itaewon

Gangnam

GANGNAM

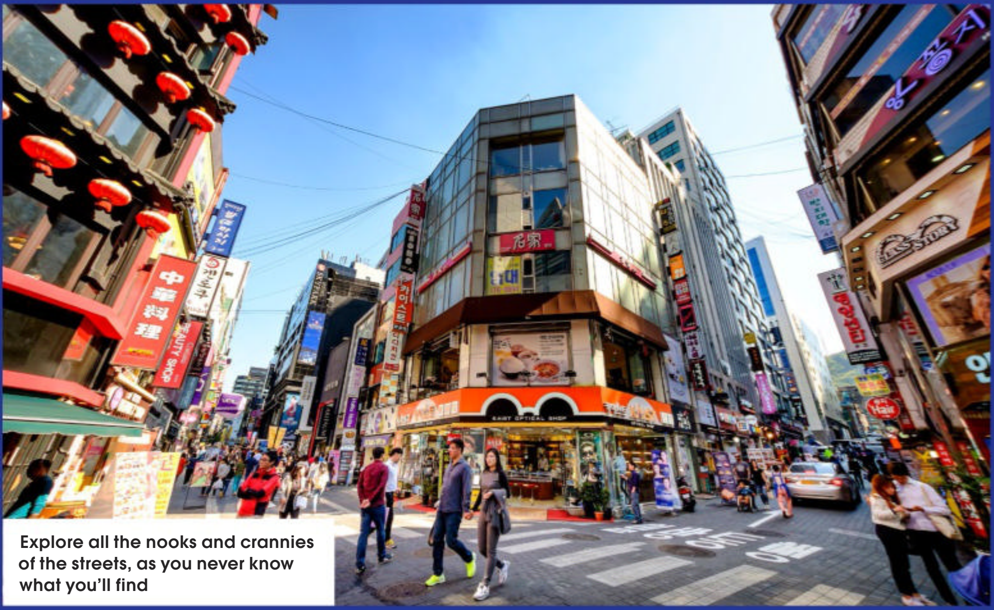
Made famous by the PSY song, Gangnam is one of the city's most upscale areas, thought of as the Beverly Hills of Seoul – it even has its own Rodeo Drive! With 23 neighbourhoods of its own, Gangnam is able to provide a little something for everyone, from the instagrammable Starfield COEX Mall to high-end designer stores and luxurious cosmetic clinics.

Seongsu

SEONGSU

Nicknamed the 'Brooklyn of Seoul', Seongsu was previously home to small factories, now converted into boutiques, vintage shops, and cafes. Weekly brand pop-ups offer immersive experiences and the latest trending products, attracting plenty of locals and tourists. With unique shopping experiences on every corner, prepare your wallet when taking a trip to Seongsu!

The view of Bongeunsa Temple with the city skyline as a backdrop is stunning



Explore all the nooks and crannies of the streets, as you never know what you'll find

but don't let the sheer amount of choice overwhelm you! If in doubt, head to the stalls selling kalguksu (Korean knife-cut noodles), bindaetteok (mung bean pancakes), or tteokbokki (spicy rice cakes). For more street food classics, check out the quieter Mangwon Market, located a short distance from Hongdae. While not as large as Gwangjang, Mangwon sells countless sweet and savoury treats – don't miss the vendors selling tempura, fried chicken, and colourful tteok (sweet rice cakes).

You can also find delicious street food in Myeongdong Market, Tongin Market, or at the many pojangmacha (outdoor carts) found on street corners. If you're looking for a market with arts, traditional crafts, and souvenirs, don't miss the Ssamzigil shopping centre, Namdaemun Market, or the underground market beneath Dongdaemun Design Plaza. Or for a more boutique and high-end shopping experience, head to Sinsa, Seongsu, or the Lotte World Tower & Mall in Gangnam.

SELF-CARE IN SEOUL

Worn out after all that sightseeing and shopping? Luckily, Seoul is a great place for a glow up. Gangnam is known for its concentration of cosmetic surgery clinics, but there are also many non-invasive treatments on offer like skin analysis, facials, laser treatments, and light therapy. Plus, areas like Myeongdong and Hongdae are famous for their hair salons, nail artists, and the viral colour-matching clinics. And if you're just looking for somewhere to sit back and relax, try a jimjilbang, or traditional Korean bathhouse. There are small, local jimjilbangs in most neighbourhoods, or bigger ones like Cimer or Aquafield, but both provide the basics: hot tubs to soak in and scrub-down services to have your skin feeling like new!

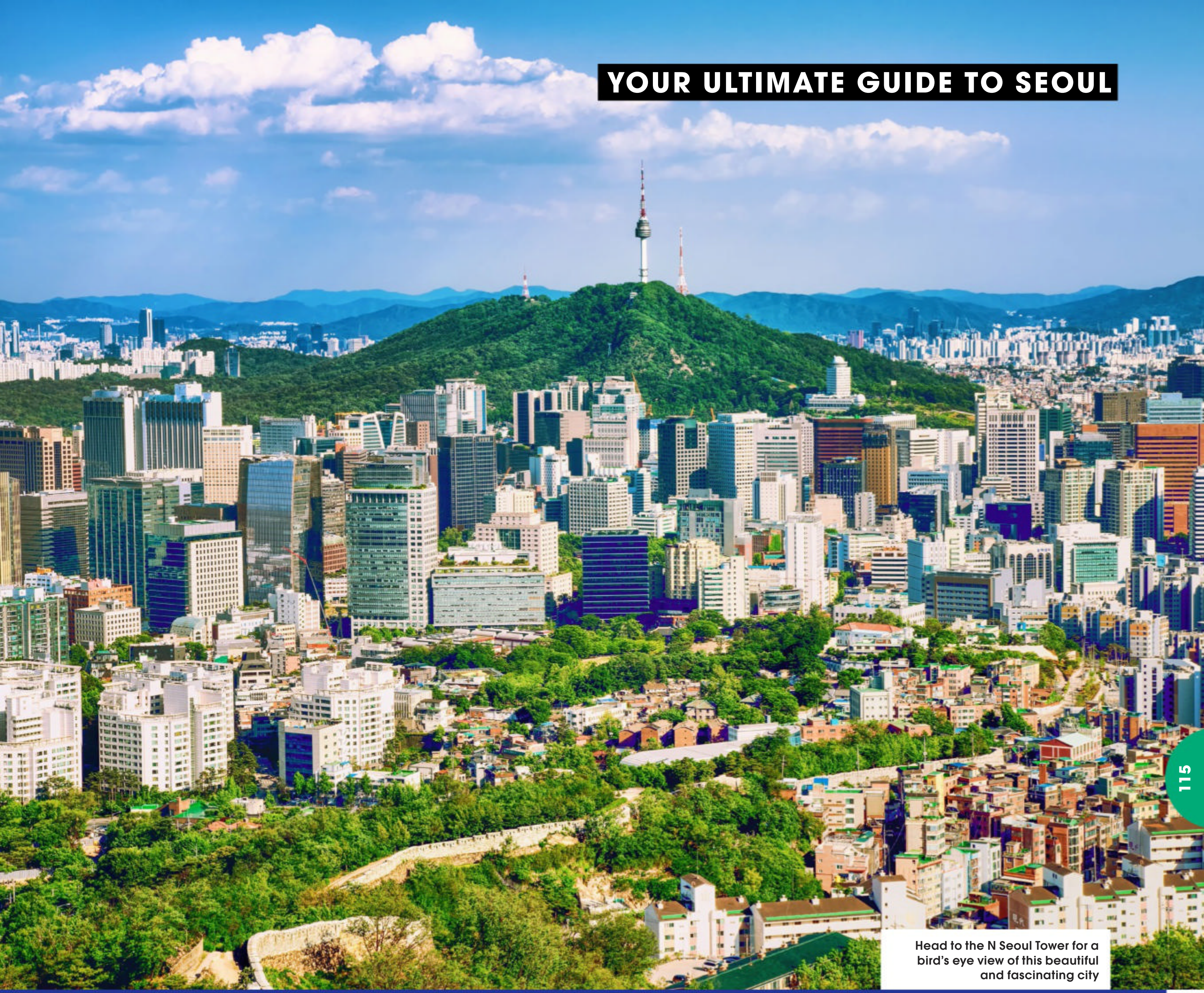
COFFEE CULTURE

A day out in Seoul isn't complete without a coffee break

Seoulites are serious about their caffeine, and the streets of the city are full of places to get your fix, whether it be cosy corner stores, themed cafes, or dessert spots with menus full of sugary delights. You can easily spend your downtime hopping from one cafe to another, particularly in trendy areas like Yeonnam (adjacent to Hongdae), Haebangchon, and Insadong.

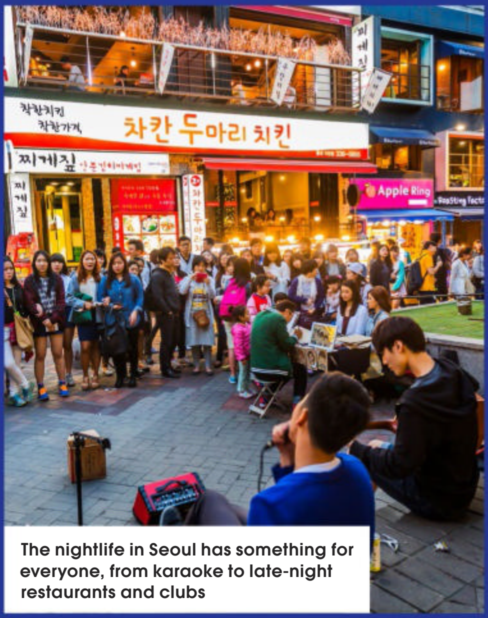
And if you're looking for something truly Instagram-worthy, check out some of Seoul's themed cafes. From aquarium-themed to Harry Potter-themed, there's something for everyone. Despite being spoilt for choice with flavoured coffees, hot teas, bubble teas, and sodas, most Koreans opt for their beloved iced Americanos – no matter what the season may be.

Eunpyeong Hanok Village in Eunpyeong District



Head to the N Seoul Tower for a bird's eye view of this beautiful and fascinating city

> “SEOUL IS A CITY FOR NIGHT OWLS, SO IF YOU'RE AN EARLY RISER, CONSIDER CHANGING YOUR ALARM!”



The nightlife in Seoul has something for everyone, from karaoke to late-night restaurants and clubs

FROM DAY TO NIGHT

Seoul is a city for night owls – a lot of cafes and shops don't open until mid-morning and the streets start coming to life at about 7pm, so if you're an early riser, consider changing your alarm! Most Koreans eat as they drink, so nights out will always start at late-night restaurants over street food and soju, before moving on to bars and clubs. Hongdae and Itaewon are the two main party districts and contain everything from techno clubs to indie music venues and hip-hop bars. And don't worry if you're not in the mood to hit the dance floor – there are countless arcades, sports bars, late-night shopping opportunities, and 24/7 restaurants. Karaoke booths are also found on every street in Seoul, and most Koreans end their night by singing their hearts out to their favourite ballads.

Seoul is a metropolis made for exploring. In between must-see landmarks like N Seoul Tower, take the time to walk through the hidden mazes of alleyways, old shop fronts, and mountain trails, in order to fully soak up its charm. No matter what you find in Seoul, you'll definitely be coming back for more.

Image source: Getty Images; Shutterstock

Following hiking trails, such as the Gwaneumsa trail on Jeju Island, is an exhilarating experience

WORDS: Hannah Grafton

NATURAL WONDERS OF SOUTH KOREA

Some of Korea's most breathtaking sights are its natural landscapes, from towering mountains to luscious forests

South Korea today is a major destination for shopping, self-care, and sightseeing, but very few tourists venture out of the sprawling cities of Seoul and Busan to see what the Korean countryside has to offer. Those that do, however, are rewarded with scenic mountain ranges, lush foliage, and crystal-clear meandering rivers, as well as plenty of opportunities for activities like hiking, golf, cycling, and skiing. Korea's former name, Joseon, has been translated as 'Land of the Morning Calm', bringing to mind the country's scenic vistas and awe-inspiring natural beauty, which are particularly powerful in the stillness of the early morning. Most Korean people live in the country's fast-paced cities, and therefore truly value getting out in nature to relax and recharge. The word 'healing' (힐링) has even been adopted as a Konglish word, used to describe the mental and physical refreshment they feel after enjoying nature.

SOUTH KOREA'S LANDSCAPES

Much of Korea's countryside is mountain ranges, which cover 70 per cent of the country. Most Korean cities are separated by mountain range after mountain range, and early European visitors are said to have compared the country to 'a sea in a heavy gale'. The highest mountain in South Korea is Hallasan (1,950 metres (6,390 feet)), the volcanic formation that towers over Jeju Island. Other popular mountains to visit include Bukhansan, called the "guardian of Seoul"; Jirisan, the country's second-highest peak; Sognisan, home to a 600-year-old pine tree; and Gyeryongsan, which resembles the body of a dragon.

Buddhist temples and shrines can be found on many of these mountains, and Koreans associate the peaks with ancient legends and mountain spirits. Many Koreans, no matter their ages, hike regularly to visit these cultural sites and reap the health benefits. Thankfully, most mountains in Korea have well-developed networks of hiking trails, built for visitors of all abilities, so tackling one of the great peaks can be the perfect day out for tourists. If you're looking for a slightly less strenuous hike, however, take a visit to Seoul's smaller mountains such as Inwangsan, Gwanaksan, and Yongmasan.

> **“MUCH OF KOREA’S STUNNING COUNTRYSIDE IS MOUNTAIN RANGES, WHICH COVER 70% OF THE COUNTRY”**

Shield volcano Hallasan is South Korea’s tallest mountain and offers stunning views across Jeju Island

NATURE FOR EVERY SEASON

If hiking isn’t something you can get excited about, there are plenty of other natural sights and outdoor activities to make you fall in love with Korean nature, no matter the season. In spring, tourists flock to the countryside and parks to see the iconic cherry blossoms, symbolising renewal. To get your cherry blossom fix in Seoul, head to Namsan Park, Naksan Park, or Seoul Forest. Alternatively, you can visit Nami Island or Jeju Island. But if you don’t fancy fighting the crowds for the best photos, there are plenty of other blossoms that come to life in spring, including vibrant yellow canola fields, multi-coloured poppies, magnolias, azaleas, and more.

In summer, enjoy Korea’s rivers and lakes with watersports like yachting, wakeboarding, and water skiing, or head to the Hangang River’s various parks, picnic spots, and fountain light shows (found at Banpo Bridge from April to October). For a summertime getaway, leave humid Seoul behind and visit one of South Korea’s many beaches, like Gyeongpo, famous for its turquoise water and white beaches, or Yangyang, Korea’s surfing paradise. Plus, if a visit to Busan is on your bucket list, Haeundae and Gwangalli beaches are some of the country’s most popular hot-weather destinations for tourists and locals.

Like spring, autumn sees Korea’s foliage transform completely, this time to vibrant red, orange, and yellow tones. To enjoy the autumn colours, visit Korea’s scenic national parks, hit the mountain trails for panoramic views of the forests, or visit local parks to take a stroll and enjoy the crisp weather.

In winter, Koreans flock to the mountains again, this time to ski and snowboard at the country’s famous resorts, such as Yongpyong, Jisan Forest, Oak Valley, and Phoenix Pyeongchang Snow Park. And if you’re not confident on the slopes, there are plenty of other ways to enjoy Korea’s winter scenery, including sledding, ice skating and ice fishing. Just be sure to pack your thermals!

Busan’s white-sand beaches are a top attraction for Koreans and tourists alike

Canola fields surrounding Jeju Island’s Seongsan Ilchulbong volcanic crater

TOP NATURE DESTINATIONS

Korea is dotted with scenic national parks, many of them being popular with Korean nature-lovers and tourists alike. Among them is Bukhansan National Park, Korea’s most popular hiking destination, which is located just north of Seoul. With forested areas, temples and mountains, Bukhansan National Park is ideal for a bit of respite from the busy streets of Seoul. Other national parks include Seoraksan National Park, containing multiple popular hiking trails, and Naejangsan National Park, made famous for its breathtaking waterfalls.

There are also around 170 different recreational forests – multi-purpose parks designed for hiking, camping, and outdoor sports – in Korea. If you’re looking to immerse yourself in nature for more than just a day trip, these forests are ideal, as they’re well-equipped for a comfortable overnight stay. Some of the most popular recreational forests are Yumyeongsan, which is the oldest and most popular in the country; Jungmisan, which has its own observatory to enjoy the night sky from; and Namhae Recreational Cypress Forest, which overlooks the water of the South Sea.

If you want a taste of Korea’s luscious foliage but don’t have time to leave the city, take a stroll around Seoul Forest in Seongdong

Bukhansan National Park is one of the country's most popular destinations for hiking and nature lovers

District. A popular spot for dog walks and first dates, Seoul Forest is a large park just north of the Hangang River, surrounded by cafes and restaurants to stop and refuel after a tour around the gardens. A permanent feature of Seoul Forest, and most parks and mountains in Korea, is the public outdoor gyms, mostly frequented by elderly Koreans that put younger gym-goers to shame!

HITTING THE BEACH

South Korea is bordered by the sea on three sides, meaning beaches and watersports have been popular for generations. Sunbathing is not common amongst Koreans, so while locals tend to cover up on the beach and rarely lay out to soak up the rays, that doesn't stop them from making the most of their beautiful beaches. Along with surfing, sailing, swimming and admiring the ocean vistas, Koreans are passionate about fresh seafood, so a visit to the beach is a must if the weather allows.

The most popular beaches in Korea are Busan's Haeundae and Gwangalli, attracting a steady stream of visitors year-round for their soft sands, cliffside walks, and stunning sunsets. Some beautiful beaches that are more off the beaten path include Gyeongpo Beach in Gangneung, Sokcho Beach, and Jeju Island's Hamdeok Beach.

> "SOUTH KOREA IS BORDERED BY THE SEA ON THREE SIDES, MEANING BEACHES AND WATERSPORTS HAVE BEEN POPULAR"

KOREA'S VERY OWN HAWAII

Jeju is the largest island and smallest province in Korea, that also happens to have the highest concentration of natural wonders. The most famous of these is Hallasan, South Korea's tallest mountain and a dormant volcano. The island's volcanic landscapes also include the Geomunoreum Lava Tube System, which is a fascinating cave-like network formed by multiple ancient volcanic eruptions, and Seongsan Ilchulbong Tuff Cone, a crater created by underwater eruptions around 5,000 years ago. These three special areas, known as 'Jeju Volcanic Island and Lava Tubes', were selected to be the first UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site in South Korea.

Yangyang is famous for its surfing, but there are also plenty of lush forests in the area to explore

Jeongbang Waterfall is Korea's only fall where the water tumbles straight into the sea

Spring means cherry blossom season and that means plenty of photo opportunities

The Yeongsil Course on Hallasan is a perfect hike for enjoying the natural scenery

Just an hour-long (and inexpensive) flight from Seoul, Jeju Island is a popular destination for cycling, swimming and yachting, as well as for hiking the Hallasan's trails. The island's black-sand beaches contrast with clear blue waters and lush green forests, earning it its nickname, the 'Hawaii of South Korea'. The island is also home to some of Korea's most picturesque waterfalls, including Cheonjiyeon Waterfall, Jeongbang Waterfall, and Cheonjeyeon Waterfall, which can all be toured in a single day. Plus, Jeju is famous for its mandarin oranges, which grow year-round and are featured in many desserts and drinks from local cafes.

RELAXING IN NATURE

Korea has a number of hot springs, known as 'oncheon' (온천), powered by subterranean volcanic activity. Korean hot springs (which differ slightly from human-made Korean bathhouses) usually include several pools of mineral-rich water, ranging from cold to piping hot. By immersing yourself in these baths, you can relax your muscles, boost your blood flow, and soften dry skin, all while soaking in Korean history. The most famous of these naturally-occurring baths is Onyang Hot Spring, which is said to be where Joseon Dynasty kings bathed, but you can also find high-quality baths in Haeundae and Dongnae, both in Busan; Suanbo Hot Springs Land in Cheongju; and Sanbangsan Carbonated Hot Springs in Jeju.

While it may be a small country, South Korea has no shortage of breathtaking nature, from snowy peaks to sandy beaches. Despite much of the country's population and tourism being concentrated in Seoul, leaving the city to explore the mountain ranges, rivers, forests, and beaches is the best way to fully appreciate the beauty of this rapidly-growing country.

ISLAND HOPPING

The south and west coasts of South Korea are peppered with thousands of islands – some tourist destinations, some uninhabited

The Korean Archipelago consists of around 3,500 islands in the South Sea of Korea, including Namhaedo, Geojedo, and Jindo. Jindo Island is perhaps the most popular of these islands, possibly due to the convenience of its connecting bridge with the mainland, and its location as a gateway to neighbouring smaller islands. Jindo is also famous for its 'Miracle of Moses', whereby receding tides give the illusion of parting water, unveiling a mysterious road from the island to the mainland.

Across the Korean peninsula, off the east coast, is Ulleungdo, a volcanic island that's perfect for keen hikers. With soft beaches and steep cliffs, the coastline is built for adventure, with the Haengnam Coastal Path offering extraordinary views across the sea. Or if you're looking for a hidden gem, Hong Island, located off the southwest coast, is home to hundreds of species of trees and animals. The tiny island is lined with cliffs in unusual formations, and is famed for its crimson sunsets.

Image source: Getty Images; Alamy

WORDS: Joanne Al-Samarae

NAEJANGSAN

Untamed rivers and ancient temples dot Korea’s maple-leaf paradise, which bursts into colour every autumn

Hidden within Naejangsan National Park’s rumpled panorama of maple forests and mountain passes lie ancient temples and crystalline waterfalls. Deep in the southwest corner of South Korea, the park’s namesake mountain rises from the ground like a city skyline, cloaked in verdant forests of ginkgo, giant dogwood, elm and alien oak. But come autumn, maple trees are the undisputed stars of the show, when they burst into a kaleidoscope of fiery hues.

More than 1,880 animal species call this pocket of wild greenery home, including the black and gold yellow-throated marten and occasional wild boar, depending on the season. This ever-changing Korean hinterland finds constancy in its 11 ancient temples – a living reminder of the area’s storied past. Peeking out from behind a curtain of nutmeg and bija trees, the majestic 7th-century Baegyangsa Temple nestles organically between mountain and valley.

Protected within its bowels are gilded Buddhas and blue-faced Heavenly Kings. Here, before sunrise each day, 50 or so monks and nuns gather for prayer, chanting in the moonlight as they have done for centuries. Offering temple stays, Baekyangsa gives guests a glimpse of monastic life – a lucky few may even sample temple cuisine prepared by the monastery’s most famous resident, the Zen Buddhist monk Jeong Kwan. Dubbed ‘the philosopher chef’, she’s garnered attention from Michelin-star names the world over for her exceptional vegan food.

Further north, a crown of towering peaks encircles the colourful Naejangsa Temple. Once a sprawling complex with more than 50 buildings, it was destroyed during the Japanese invasion of 1597 and again in the Korean War, and largely reconstructed in the 1970s. Nearby, a stunning blue and green pavilion floats atop a fish-filled lake. According to local legend, the pavilion once grew wings, and flew to heaven.

Linking temples, mountains and waterfalls, a number of trails snake through the park. Not for the faint of heart, the punishing Ridge Circuit traces Naejangsan Mountain’s almost-circular rim, taking in all eight of its peaks. At 11 kilometres (seven miles) long, it rewards with magnificent views over the lush valley below.

Alternatively, the Baekyangsa Walking Trail begins at Baekyangsa Temple, before passing through Yeongcheongul Cave. A steep ascent leads hikers to Naejangsa Temple and the summit of Sangwangbong, in the less travelled south of the park. A spider’s web of shorter routes, like the Geumseon Gorge and Nature Observation trails, mean smaller sections of the circuit can be done if time is limited. Geumseon Falls, where the gods are said to have bathed, and 108 Danpung Tunnel, a path lined with 108 maple trees, should not be missed. Alternatively, the fastest way to see large swathes of the park is by cable car, which whisks guests to Yeonjabong Peak’s observatory.

Roughly 1,880 animal species call Naejangsan home, including the yellow-throated marten

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

WHERE?
Jeongeup-si

HIGHLIGHTS

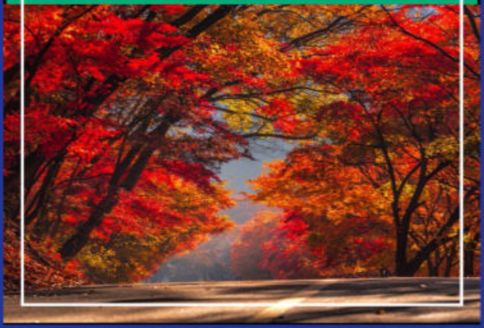
- ★ Learn to cook with Jeong Kwan at Baekyangsa Temple
- ★ Stand atop Sinseongbong for unrivalled views of the valley
- ★ Discover the ancient art of shinrin-yoku, or forest bathing

MORE INFORMATION
english.knps.or.kr

Established in 632 CE by Zen Master Yeohwan, today Baegyangsa offers temple stays

AUTUMN IN NAEJANGSAN

Considered one of the most magical places to witness the leaves change, Naejangsan’s red carpet event happens each year from late October to mid November, when the forest’s leaves turn shades of crimson, turmeric and mustard. Crowds will be heavy and the atmosphere merry, as friends share plates of steaming pork and cups of makgeolli, local rice wine. Travellers should make a pitstop at Naejang Village, close to the park entrance, to stock up on snacks, drinks and delicious local food like bibimbap, a rice dish topped with vegetables, a raw egg, chilli, soy sauce and fermented soybean paste.



NAEJANGSAN

Image source: Getty Images; Alamy

WORDS: Hannah Grafton

KOREAN HOLIDAYS AND FESTIVALS

Soak up Korean tradition with some of the country's biggest cultural celebrations

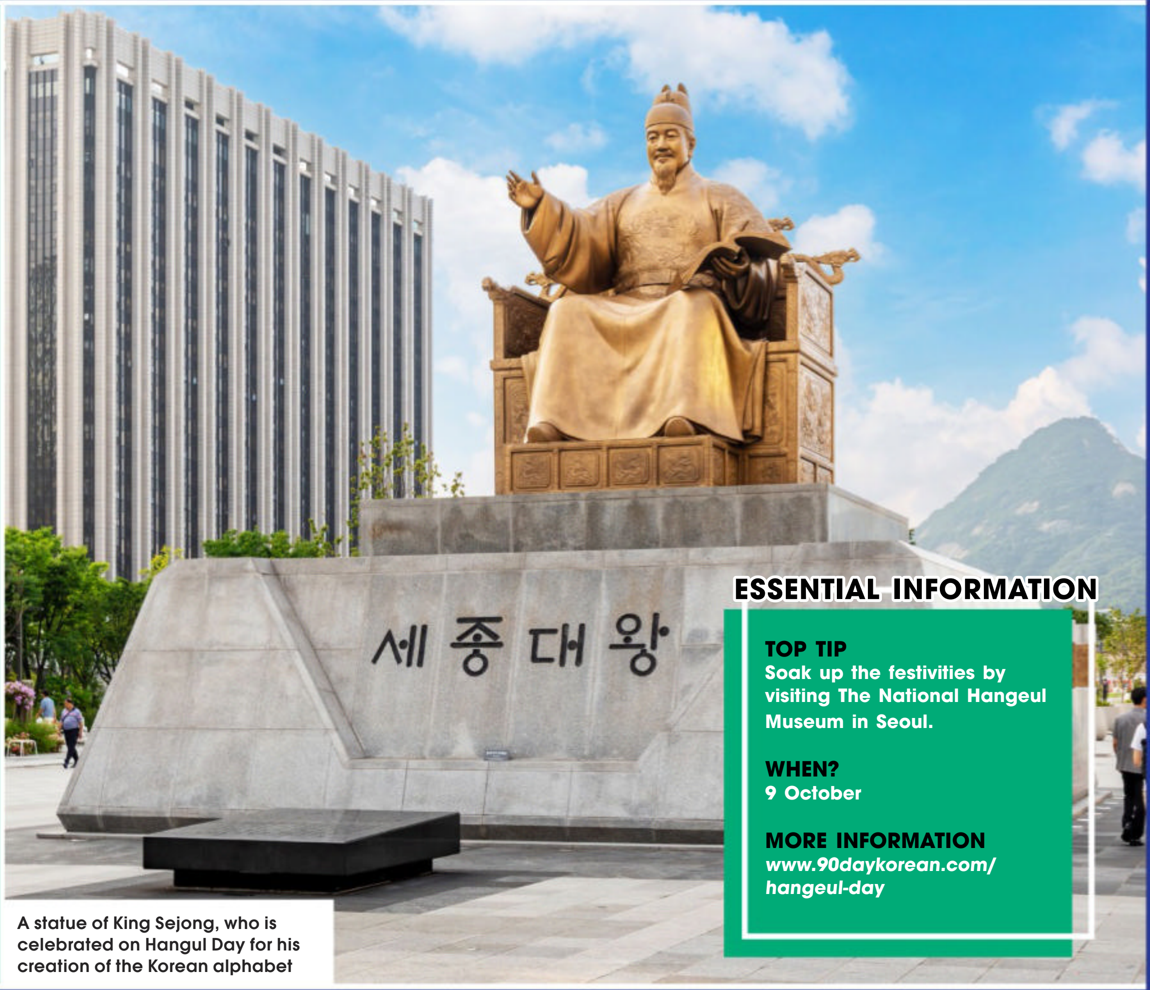
Experiencing local holidays and festivals is a unique part of visiting a country, and is a great opportunity to try new cuisines, watch traditional performances, and visit different places. Despite being workaholics, South Korea's rich culture includes a number of yearly holidays and festivals, almost always celebrated with family and friends.

These unique celebrations offer their own glimpse into Korean traditions, but some larger holidays can interrupt travel plans, particularly when shops and restaurants close or locals flood the airports to visit family. With this in mind, it's important to familiarise yourself with some major holidays and festivals and when they fall, so you can plan your Korea trip accordingly.

HANGUL DAY

Hangul Day, celebrated every 9 October, is a national holiday that commemorates King Sejong's creation of Korea's alphabet, aka Hangul, in 1446. The development of Hangul is credited for boosting the country's literacy rate and making both reading and writing accessible to people of all classes.

Hangul Day started as a protest in 1926, when Koreans rallied to protect their language and cultural identity during the period of Japanese occupation. As the years have gone by, the holiday has evolved to become what it is today – a chance to celebrate Korean history and language with exhibitions, festivals, and competitions highlighting the written word. Today, busy Koreans usually spend Hangul Day getting some well-deserved rest and relaxing with friends over food and drink.



A statue of King Sejong, who is celebrated on Hangul Day for his creation of the Korean alphabet

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

TOP TIP
Soak up the festivities by visiting The National Hangeul Museum in Seoul.

WHEN?
9 October

MORE INFORMATION
www.90daykorean.com/hangeul-day

Korean families gather at Chuseok to pay respect to their ancestors and enjoy sweet rice cakes

CHUSEOK

Often referred to as 'Korean Thanksgiving', Chuseok is one of the biggest and most important holidays for Koreans. The holiday is a celebration of the year's good harvest, where families from all over the country come together to give thanks to their ancestors, share stories, and eat traditional food. The three-day holiday period includes the day of Chuseok itself and the days before and after it, meaning Koreans have time to journey into the countryside or to their hometowns to be with family members.

Along with ancestral worship and grave maintenance, families typically gather to eat songpyeon (sweet rice cakes), japchae (glass noodles), jeon (savoury pancakes), and galbijjim (braised beef short ribs). When they're not eating delicious homemade food, families will participate in traditional folk games and dancing. Although gifts are not a necessary part of the holiday, most family members will offer their host a gift set of meat, fruit, or canned goods like Spam.

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

TOP TIP
Avoid road trips and public transport during Chuseok, as most Koreans will be journeying home so it's very busy.

WHEN?
The 15th day of the 8th month of the lunar calendar, usually in September or October.

MORE INFORMATION
asiasociety.org/korea/chuseok-korean-thanksgiving-day

SEOLLAL

The national holiday of Seollal is a three-day celebration surrounding the first day of the lunar calendar. While this holiday is celebrated in countries across Asia, Korea has its own traditions and customs. Like Chuseok, it is mostly family-oriented, with one of its key traditions being sebae – kneeling on the ground and bowing to your elders to show respect, in exchange for envelopes of money.

Since the celebration centres around good luck and fortune for the upcoming year, some Koreans like to wake up to witness the first sunrise of the lunar calendar, visit a fortune-teller, and many give gifts to their loved ones. Koreans also enjoy tteokguk (a savoury soup made from sliced rice cakes) as they believe the rice cakes represent coins, signifying wealth.

Seollal involves setting a table with traditional foods and offerings for family and ancestors

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

TOP TIP
During the time of Seollal, entry to Seoul's major palaces is free and gifts are sometimes given out to visitors.

WHEN?
The first day of the lunar year, which is at the end of January or the beginning of February.

MORE INFORMATION
english.visitkorea.or.kr/svc/main/index.do

CHILDREN'S DAY

While Children's Day is recognised around the world, Korea is one of the only countries that has declared it a national holiday, with offices and schools closing to enable families to spend quality time together. The first Children's Day in Korea was declared in 1923 and has since become a celebration that honours young people of all ages, as well as a major calendar date for department stores as parents descend in otder to buy children's toys as gifts.

Along with giving gifts to children, families usually visit amusement parks, zoos, national parks and shopping centres on Children's Day, so these public places can get particularly crowded. With the holiday falling in early May, the weather is also perfect for outdoor sports, picnics, and hiking.

Families spend Children's Day treating their kids to food and days out at the zoo or theme park

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

TOP TIP
Even for adults, Children's Day is a great excuse to get out and enjoy the spring weather.

WHEN?
5 May

MORE INFORMATION
www.nfm.go.kr

More Koreans are starting to celebrate Christmas, albeit differently to Western countries

CHRISTMAS

You're probably no stranger to Christmas, but it's worth highlighting here because of the differences to the festivities of the Western world. In Korea, Christmas wasn't a widely celebrated holiday in the past, but is becoming more popular as the years go by, especially given that around a third of the population is Christian.

Many Koreans are now given 25 December off work to celebrate – for religious people, this usually means church gatherings, but for most, Christmas is a chance to go on a day date or hang out with friends. Gifts aren't necessary and most cafes, bars, and restaurants remain open, meaning Christmas Day is less about family traditions and more about relaxing over warming food and a few glasses of soju. And despite having Lunar New Year a few weeks later, Korea also celebrates Gregorian New Year's Eve on 31 December, often with fireworks, special performances, and socialising with friends and family.

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

TOP TIP
Christmas in Korea is the perfect time for date nights and meals with friends.

WHEN?
25 December

MORE INFORMATION
www.90daykorean.com/christmas-in-korea-what-is-it-like/

ANDONG MASKDANCE FESTIVAL

A couple of hours from Seoul is the city of Andong and the traditional settlement, Hahoe Folk Village. Every autumn, this UNESCO World Heritage Site holds a multi-day festival of traditional culture and dance performances. It celebrates traditional Korean masks that represent stock characters in dance dramas, which were an important part of ceremonies dating back to the 12th century.

The festival includes traditional mask performances from Korea and around the world, with international dancers performing, playing folk games, and acting out stories, including Chajeon Nori (the chariot battle) and Notdari Bapgi (walking over a human bridge). Mask-themed attractions are also available, including mask-making competitions, exhibitions, and immersive experiences.

If you want a taste of traditional Korean folk life, the Andong Maskdance Festival is a must!

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

TOP TIP
Expect to pay around 7,000 Korean won for adult tickets to the festival.

WHEN?
The festival spans a few days, usually in September or October.

MORE INFORMATION
www.maskdance.com

SEOUL INTERNATIONAL FIREWORKS FESTIVAL

Every October in Seoul, professional fireworks teams from South Korea, Japan, Canada, France and more participate in the Seoul International Fireworks Festival, which takes place at Yeouido, on the Hangang River. Around 100,000 fireworks light up the sky each year in a visual spectacle that can be seen from across the city. Before the display, the festival also showcases performances, shows, and cultural events, attracting over a million visitors every year. Yeouido and the parks along the river can therefore get extremely crowded, so booking a river cruise or watching from a rooftop bar is an excellent way to enjoy the sight.

In October, Busan also hosts its own fireworks festival, and despite attracting a slightly smaller crowd, the city is able to set off larger displays and laser light shows due to its seaside location, so could be the ideal evening out if you're a pyrotechnics lover.

Spectators line the banks of the Hangang River every October for Seoul's International Fireworks Festival

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

TOP TIP
For the best views, consider booking a rooftop bar or restaurant – but book early!

WHEN?
Early October.

MORE INFORMATION
www.ydp.go.kr

JEJU FIRE FESTIVAL

Jeju Island has its own unique culture, and the yearly Jeju Fire Festival, held in March, is an important part of this. The festival's roots come from a tradition called 'bangae', where Jeju cattle farmers would burn down fields during the winter to renew the grasses and exterminate vermin, before letting their cows and horses graze again.

Today, Jeju Fire Festival is held at Saebyeol Oreum, a 119m-tall (390ft) volcanic cone. Around 1,000 people from the local community participate in the festival, which lights up the Jeju sky with fire shows, torch marches, and traditional performances.

The Jeju Fire Festival honours ancient traditions established by the island's cattle farmers

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

TOP TIP
Jeju Fire Festival is free to attend, but remember to bring your wallet if you want to try the local food trucks' delicacies.

WHEN?
Every March.

MORE INFORMATION
www.visitjeju.net

Many Koreans visit ancient temples like Jongmyo Shrine on Hansik in order to perform traditional rites

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

TOP TIP
Korea has many delicious cold noodle dishes, including naengmyeon and kongguksu.

WHEN?
Early April.

MORE INFORMATION
www.nfm.go.kr

HANSIK, OR THE COLD FOOD FESTIVAL

Hansik, also known as the Cold Food Festival, is one of the major markers of Korean springtime. Falling 105 days after winter solstice, in early April, Hansik derives from an ancient Chinese practice of not using fire for a period of time and therefore only eating cold food. Korean people are usually given the day off work for Hansik, and many visit shrines around the country to perform sacrificial rites and tend the graves of their ancestors, just as families do during Chuseok and Seollal.

Hansik festival also marks the beginning of farming season, and people use the weather on the day of Hansik as a sign of the harvest to come. For example, if the weather on Hansik is clear and not windy, it's assumed the harvest will be fruitful, but if it's overcast or windy, the season ahead will not be as favourable.

GWANGJU KIMCHI FESTIVAL

Held every November in the peak of 'kimjang' (the kimchi-making process) season, the Gwangju Kimchi Festival is one of South Korea's most popular events. Founded in 1996, the festival is a love letter to Korea's beloved kimchi and its cultural significance, uniting people from all over the world to share their love of the dish.

Located in Gwangju, in the southwest of the country, the event offers a wide range of tasty kimchi products to purchase, in addition to kimchi tasting, and the opportunity to roll your sleeves up and get involved in the kimjang process.

Each year the festival also holds a kimchi competition, open to amateurs and professionals alike, and visitors can enjoy cultural performances as well as traditional games.

Celebrate the ancient (and messy!) process of making kimchi at this festival in Gwangju

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

TOP TIP
Entry is usually free, but make sure that you book transport to Gwangju in advance.

WHEN?
Three to four days each November.

MORE INFORMATION
english.visitkorea.or.kr/svc/main/index.do

Image source: Getty Images; Alamy; Shutterstock

WORDS: Hannah Grafton

10 MUST-SEE SIGHTS IN SOUTH KOREA

From historical palaces to modern skyscrapers, see some of South Korea's iconic landmarks and plan your perfect trip

South Korea's landmarks have a very unique history. The majority of buildings were made from wood until the late 19th century, meaning the country was especially vulnerable, first during the Japanese invasion of 1592, and later the bombing of the Korean War. With many homes and official buildings like palaces burnt down, towns and cities had to be rebuilt from the ground up, sometimes multiple times.

This has given the country its own unique fusion of old and new, with many landmarks telling a story of endurance and determination. While it's impossible to see every sight that the country has to offer in one trip, consider spending some time soaking in Korea's rich history and culture by visiting the following places.

Changdeokgung's stunning secret gardens features pagodas, ponds, greenhouses, and flower beds

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

WHERE?
The Jongo district of Seoul, which is accessible via Anguk or Jongno 3-ga stations.

TOP TIP
If you wear a traditional Korean hanbok, entry is free!

CHANGDEOKGUNG PALACE AND JONGMYO SHRINE

Although it was built as a secondary residence to the primary palace, Gyeongbokgung, by King Taejong in 1405, Changdeokgung Palace is just as impressive. The palace includes 13 buildings and 28 pavilions, but its key difference from Gyeongbokgung is its romantic rear gardens, which include a lotus pond, greenhouse, and landscaped flower beds, perfect for a relaxing stroll away from the bustle of Seoul. Some of the garden was originally forbidden to enter without the king's permission, hence its name 'biwon', which translates as 'secret garden'.

Just below Changdeokgung Palace is Jongmyo Shrine, a landmark housing the spirit tablets of Joseon Dynasty kings and queens. The Jongmyo Shrine is the oldest and most authentic Confucian royal ancestral shrine, and its unique structure is fascinating to behold. Although you need to pay a separate entrance fee for these two sites, their proximity means you can easily explore both in one afternoon.

Lotte World Tower looks down on the entirety of Seoul, including the adjacent Lotte World theme park

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

WHERE?
Seoul, accessible via Jamsil train station.

TOP TIP
Visit the Lotte World Tower just before sunset for magical views of Seoul.

LOTTE TOWER & LOTTE WORLD

It's hard to imagine looking down onto the N Seoul Tower, but that's exactly what you do when you step out onto the observation deck of the Lotte World Tower. South Korea's tallest building and among the top ten buildings in the world, Lotte World Tower is a modern-day wonder of the Seoul skyline. Along with marvelling at the city from the 118th floor, you can brave the Seoul Sky Bridge Walk, which is an outdoor bridge connecting the two sides of the tower's peak.

And if that's not enough to get your adrenaline pumping, attached to the Lotte World Tower is Lotte World, Seoul's most iconic theme park. Containing a large indoor theme park, outdoor amusements park, monorail, ice skating rink, and Korean folk museum, Lotte World is a fun day out for kids and adults alike.

N SEOUL TOWER

Namsan Seoul Tower (aka N Seoul Tower) was built at the peak of Namsan mountain in the late 1960s and early 1970s, originally used for transmission purposes to block North Korean TV and radio from reaching Seoul. In 1980, however, the tower and observatory was opened to the public, and it wasn't long before it cemented itself as one of the most recognisable and central landmarks of Seoul.

Standing at almost 500m (1,640ft) above sea level, the observatory offers 360-degree views across Seoul and its surrounding mountains, giving visitors a unique perspective of the Korean capital. While a ticket is required to ascend to the observatory, tourists and locals can enjoy the views from Namsan Park, at the tower's base, for free. If the weather permits, it's well worth braving the 600-step trail to the top, although the cable car also offers stunning views of its own.

The Namsan cable car takes just a couple of minutes to ascend, with one-way or return ticket options

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

WHERE?
The centre of Seoul – you can't miss it! Head to Hoehyeon station to catch the cable car up, or use one of the multiple hiking routes or shuttle buses by checking NAVER Map.

TOP TIP
Hundreds, even thousands, of couples have left love locks on the viewing platforms at the base of the tower. Remember to take a padlock with you if you wish to do the same!

DEOKSUGUNG PALACE

While you're visiting Jongno, Seoul's historic centre, don't miss one of its lesser-known palaces – Deoksugung. The smallest of the city's five palaces, it was the final residence of King Gojong, the last king of the Joseon Dynasty. Along with traditional Korean buildings and pavilions, including Hamnyeongjeon Hall (the King's bedroom), and Deokhongjeong Hall, which was used to entertain foreign visitors, Deoksugung Palace's Western-style buildings also set it apart. These include Seokjojeon Hall, which is now a museum; Dondeokjeon Hall, a royal guesthouse; and a Western pond and fountain.

Visit Deoksugung for the changing of the guard ceremony at 11am, 2pm and 3.30pm, or just take a walk through the scenic gardens and enjoy its fusion of Korean and Western architecture. The palace's foliage comes to life with cherry blossoms in spring and jewel-toned leaves in autumn, so prepare to take your camera if you're visiting during these seasons!

Deoksugung Palace features a number of unique Western-style buildings among traditional Korean pavilions

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

WHERE?
Seoul, City Hall subway station.

TOP TIP
Entry to the palace is free when you wear Korean hanbok.

CHEOMSEONGDAE OBSERVATORY

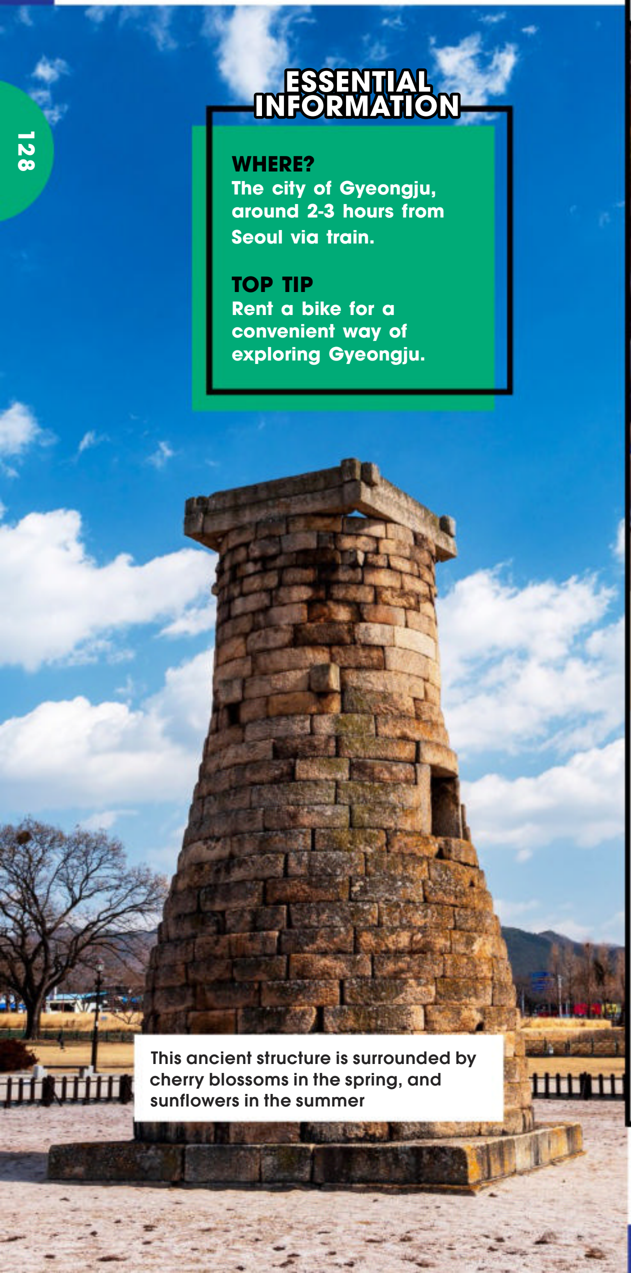
One of the major landmarks of Gyeongju, the Cheomseongdae Observatory was constructed in the 7th century and is part of Gyeongju Historic Areas, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The structure was built in a cylindrical shape, around 9m (29ft) in height, with astronomers climbing up and inside the structure to view the night sky. The observatory is made of 365 stones, symbolising the number of days in a year.

Astronomy fan or not, the Cheomseongdae Observatory is a worthwhile visit, especially if you plan on taking some time to explore Gyeongju. Throughout the year, the observatory is surrounded by various seasonal flora and fauna, including autumn's famous muhly, which is pink candy floss-like grass. Just north of the observatory, you can visit the huge hills that comprise Gyeongju's ancient tombs, housing former Joseon Dynasty kings and queens.

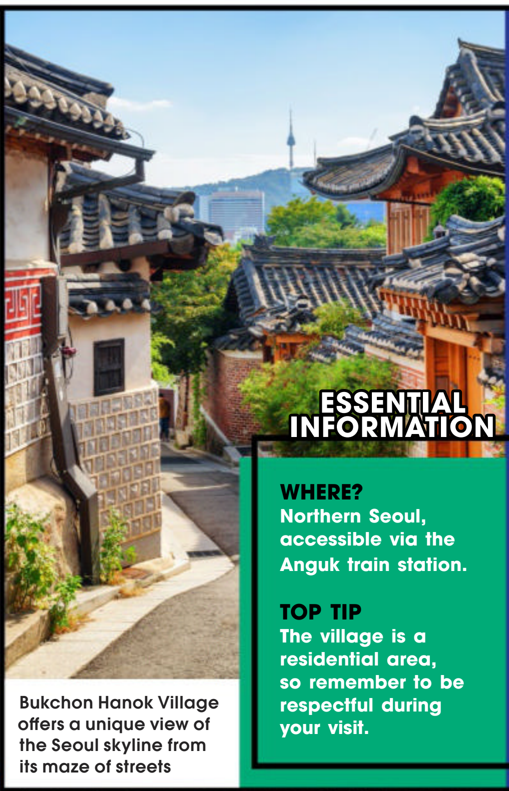
ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

WHERE?
The city of Gyeongju, around 2-3 hours from Seoul via train.

TOP TIP
Rent a bike for a convenient way of exploring Gyeongju.



This ancient structure is surrounded by cherry blossoms in the spring, and sunflowers in the summer



Bukchon Hanok Village offers a unique view of the Seoul skyline from its maze of streets

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

WHERE?
Northern Seoul, accessible via the Anguk train station.

TOP TIP
The village is a residential area, so remember to be respectful during your visit.

BUKCHON HANOK VILLAGE

Bukchon Hanok Village is home to hundreds of hanoks (traditional houses) dating back to the Joseon Dynasty, providing visitors with the opportunity to step back in time and admire the Seoul skyline over the picturesque rooftops. Many of the hanoks contain quaint cafes, trendy restaurants, and tea houses, operating as cultural centres for locals and tourists alike.

Bukchon Hanok Village has become a major attraction and photoshoot location for tourists, and problems have started to arise relating to overtourism. The village is still a residential area, and although most locals are more than happy to accommodate visitors, it can get pretty busy, so ensure you're always being considerate of residents. If you're looking for a quieter hanok spot, you can also try visiting other areas like Ikseon-dong Hanok Street or Eunpyeong Hanok Village.

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

WHERE?
Andong, around 2-3 hours via train from Seoul. From Andong, catch the 246, 11, or designated shuttle bus to Hahoe Folk Village.

TOP TIP
Stay overnight in a traditional hanok home for a unique experience.

Hahoe Folk Village holds its own mask festival every year, celebrating the village's ancient customs

HAHOE FOLK VILLAGE

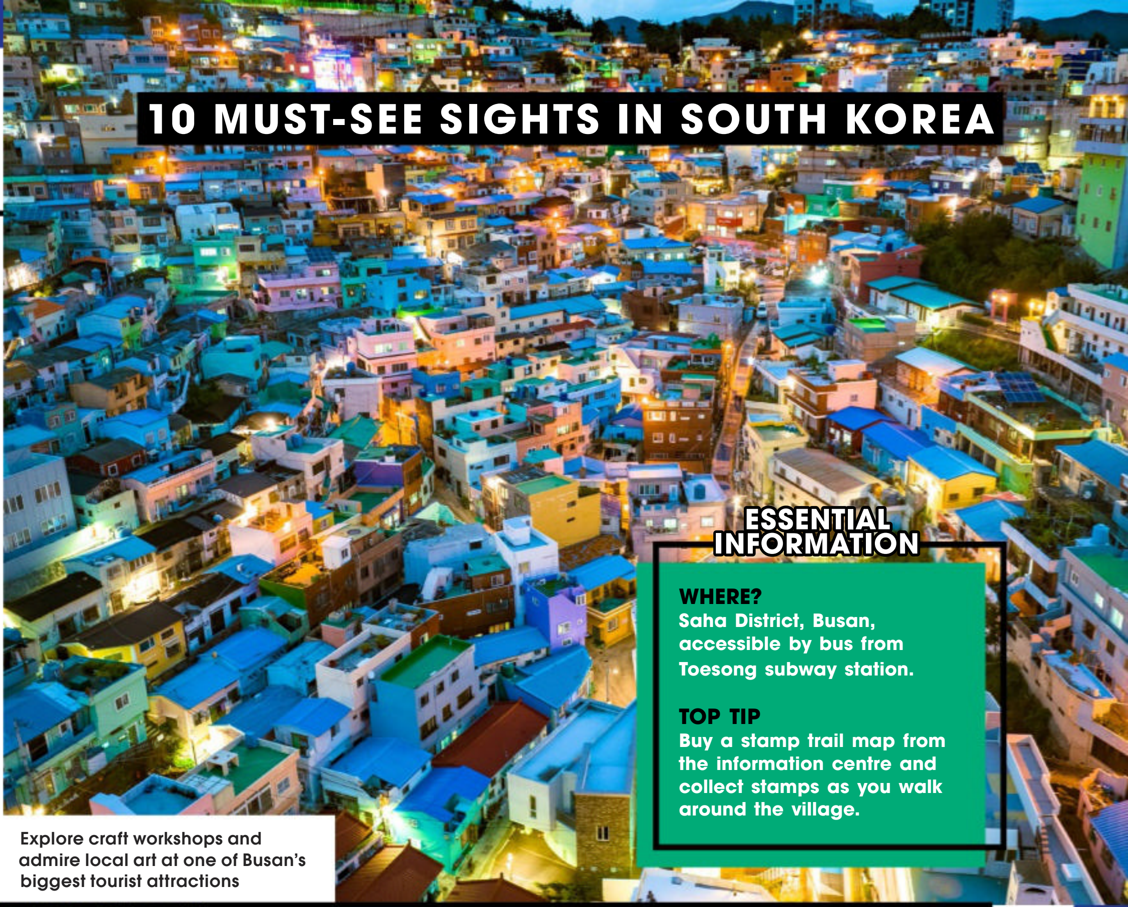
Hahoe is one of the most famous traditional villages in South Korea. Located near the city of Andong, Hahoe Folk Village is best known as the birthplace of brothers Ryu Unryong and Ryu Seongryong – a great Confucian scholar of the Joseon Dynasty and a prime minister of the 1500s, respectively. The village preserves Joseon-style architecture and traditions with its thatched-roof huts and irregular alleyways, and many locals still live here, cultivating the surrounding farmland despite their homes becoming a popular tourist attraction.

While in the area, make sure you explore the Hahoe Mask Museum's collection of traditional masks, which are worn for dances, events, and ceremonies to this day. And if you have time to head into Andong itself, check out the Andong Gu Market for local souvenirs, and be sure to try Andong soju as well as the local speciality dish, jjimdak (soy sauce chicken and glass noodles).

GAMCHEON CULTURE VILLAGE

Often compared to Santorini or Machu Picchu due to its mountain-side location, Gamcheon Culture Village is known for its maze of alleyways, layered streets, and brightly-coloured houses. The village was built during the 1920s to house the working-class population of Busan, and eventually became home to refugees during the Korean War. In 2009, the government kicked off a renovation effort, calling for residents, artists, and students to decorate the village with art.

Since then, Gamcheon's streets of painted walls, murals, and installations have become a leading tourist attraction in Busan. Today, you can get lost in the labyrinth of small walkways, marvel at the art on display, and even create your own souvenirs at dedicated artist-run workshops within the village – the perfect day trip for arts and crafts lovers.



Explore craft workshops and admire local art at one of Busan's biggest tourist attractions

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

WHERE?
Saha District, Busan, accessible by bus from Toesong subway station.

TOP TIP
Buy a stamp trail map from the information centre and collect stamps as you walk around the village.

DMZ
제3땅굴
The 3rd tunnel
개성
서울
NORTH KOREA

The DMZ can be a sobering trip, but it's an important and interesting part of Korean history

DMZ

The Korean Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) sits on the 38th parallel of the Korean Peninsula, about 56km (35mi) north of Seoul. The DMZ was established in 1953 to be a buffer zone between North Korea and South Korea, lined on both sides by electric fences, tanks, land mines and armed forces. The DMZ is about 257km (160mi) in length and over 3km (2mi) in width, but most visitors are taken on guided tours to very specific areas along and near the border, as you cannot visit the DMZ without these authorised operators. Guided excursions usually stop by the Unification Village, Third Infiltration Tunnel, and the Dora Observatory. While the DMZ is a must-visit for history buffs, it's certainly not to be taken lightly. The tension in and around these sites is palpable, so make sure to always show respect and follow your guide.

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

WHERE?
The DMZ is surprisingly close to Seoul, around a 50-minute drive, but you can only visit by booking a guided tour. There are many options offering variations of the same experience.

TOP TIP
Remember your passport as it is required to enter and exit the DMZ.

BULGUKSA TEMPLE

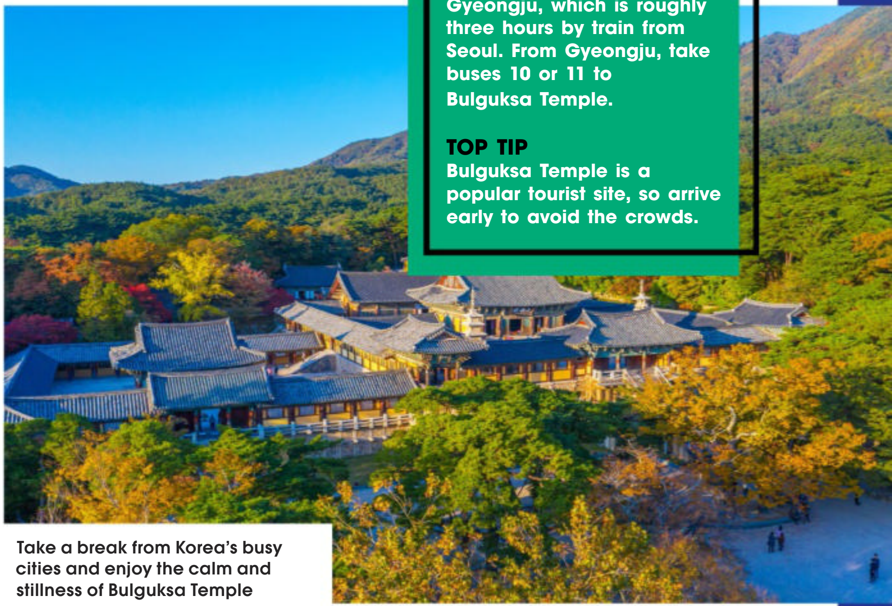
Bulguksa Temple sits just outside the ancient capital of Korea, Gyeongju. The temple is a relic of Buddhist culture in Korea, and the site dates all the way back to King Beopheung's reign in 514-540. The subject of heavy restoration work since the 1920s, Bulguksa Temple is now a World Cultural Heritage Site, as designated by UNESCO, and a must-visit if you're travelling to the southern part of South Korea.

The temple contains several national treasures, including the Dabotap Pagoda, the Seokgatap Pagoda, the Birojana-bul (The Buddha of Cosmic Energy) and two bridges along the front side of the temple. Although the site isn't huge and can be explored in a couple of hours, try to take your time walking around these historic grounds, soaking in the healing woodland setting, and savouring some of South Korea's ancient wonders.

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

WHERE?
Just outside the city of Gyeongju, which is roughly three hours by train from Seoul. From Gyeongju, take buses 10 or 11 to Bulguksa Temple.

TOP TIP
Bulguksa Temple is a popular tourist site, so arrive early to avoid the crowds.



Take a break from Korea's busy cities and enjoy the calm and stillness of Bulguksa Temple

Image source: Getty Images; Shutterstock

KOREA

Future PLC Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA

Editorial
Editor **Jessica Leggett**
Designer **Briony Duguid**
Head of Art & Design **Greg Whitaker**
Editorial Director **Jon White**
Managing Director **Grainne McKenna**

Contributors
Hareth Al Bustani, Joanne Al-Samarae, Mark Dolan,
Hannah Grafton, Scott Reeves, Dave Smith

Cover images
Getty Images

Photography
All copyrights and trademarks are recognised and respected

Advertising
Media packs are available on request
Commercial Director **Clare Dove**

International
Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw**
licensing@futurenet.com
www.futurecontenthub.com

Circulation
Head of Newstrade **Tim Mathers**

Production
Head of Production **Mark Constance**
Production Project Manager **Matthew Eglinton**
Advertising Production Manager **Joanne Crosby**
Digital Editions Controller **Jason Hudson**
Production Managers **Keely Miller, Nola Cokely,**
Vivienne Calvert, Fran Twentyman

Printed in the UK

Distributed by Marketforce – www.marketforce.co.uk
For enquiries, please email: mfcommunications@futurenet.com

GPSR EU RP (for authorities only)
eucomply OÜ Pärnu mnt 139b-14 11317, Tallinn, Estonia
hello@eucompliancepartner.com, +3375690241

Book of Korea First Edition (LBZ7019)
© 2025 Future Publishing Limited

We are committed to only using magazine paper which is derived from responsibly managed, certified forestry and chlorine-free manufacture. The paper in this bookazine was sourced and produced from sustainable managed forests, conforming to strict environmental and socioeconomic standards.

All contents © 2025 Future Publishing Limited or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

FUTURE
Connectors.
Creators.
Experience
Makers.

Future plc is a public
company quoted on the
London Stock Exchange
(symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

Chief Executive Officer **Kevin Yi Ling**
Non-Executive Chairman **Richard Huntingford**
Chief Financial Officer **Sharjeel Suleman**

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

Widely Recycled

ipso. Regulated

KOREA

YOUR HANDBOOK TO THE LAND OF MORNING CALM

HISTORY OF KOREA

THE THREE KINGDOMS OF KOREA

HISTORY OF THE PENINSULA

Step back in time and explore
Korea's long and varied past

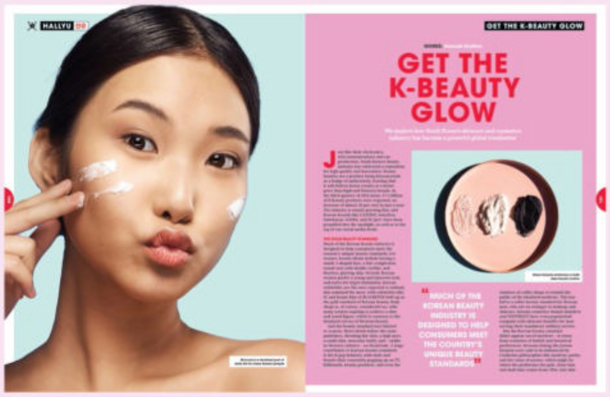
CULTURE & CUSTOMS

A TASTE OF SOUTH KOREA

"THE AVERAGE KOREAN CAN CONSUME UP TO 50G OF KIMCHI PER DAY, AND THE GOVERNMENT EVEN SPENT TEN YEARS TRYING TO PERFECT FREEZE-DRIED KIMCHI FOR THE KOREAN ASTRONAUTS"

CULTURE & CUSTOMS

Explore a vibrant tapestry of timeless
traditions and cultural heritage



HALLYU

GET THE K-BEAUTY GLOW

"MUCH OF THE KOREAN BEAUTY INDUSTRY IS DESIGNED TO HELP CONSUMERS MEET THE COUNTRY'S UNIQUE BEAUTY STANDARDS"

THE KOREAN WAVE

Immerse yourself in the exciting world
of Hallyu, from K-pop to K-beauty

TRAVEL

NATURAL WONDERS OF SOUTH KOREA

"MUCH OF KOREA'S STUNNING COUNTRYSIDE IS MOUNTAIN RANGES, WHICH COVER 70% OF THE COUNTRY"

THE PERFECT TRIP

Discover the breathtaking landscapes
and landmarks of South Korea

BOOKAZINE